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Czech Immigrants in Nebraska: A Question of Identity and Assimilation

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Abstract

This thesis examines the dynamics of cultural and social assimilation through the experiences of Czech immigrants into Nebraska. The Czechs' long struggle to maintain their ethnic identity has shaped their experiences with assimilation. After a review of assimilation theory, I conclude that the Czech experience with assimilation follows a "straight-line" assimilation model, a progression of assimilation that is complete by the third generation. Their relatively small size, settlement in rural areas, and a strong desire to maintain ethnic identity, as reflected in the formation of Czech language benevolent associations, gymnastic societies, and Czech language newspapers, led to "social" and "structural" assimilation but fell short of psychological and acculturation. Thus, the Czech experience better reflects the idea of cultural pluralism than Americanization. This idea suggests that ethnic groups maintain elements of their identity, in spite of assimilating in other areas of life. This thesis is tested by examining three variables: language, farming practices and rural land ownership, and intermarriage. As Czech immigration declined following the world wars, language maintenance became the most important element in cultural maintenance. This was done by publishing Czech language newspapers and resisting Americanization by opening "ethnic schools". The Czech language was mostly maintained through the second generation and thereafter faced significant decline. I found that intermarriage, as demonstrated by primary source evidence of marriage announcements from a Wilbur, Nebraska newspaper, followed a similar pattern. A detailed analysis of Czech-American land holding patterns in Nebraska, drawn from the available plat books from the 20th century, suggest a different pattern. The data shows that among the three variables, land ownership is most resistant to change or decline over time. Wilber, Nebraska Czech land holdings remained "relatively untouched by the hands of time." This resistance has been the

basis of a revival in the desire to maintain Czech language, culture, and Czech identity. In this way, Czech Americans have both maintained their ethnic identity and become a part of a diverse multi-cultural American society.

Key Words: History, Immigration, Czech, Assimilation, Nebraska

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Introduction

The United States is often seen as being a melting pot, one that is defined by different people and different cultures. Despite the negative views that have developed towards immigrants over the course of the twenty-first century, Americans still take pride in the fact their ancestors had immigrated from far off lands and had created farming settlements that would eventually become the backbone of American society. But Americans have not always taken so kindly to immigrants. American history is riddled with incidences where its people have encouraged and even forced assimilation and Americanization onto immigrants.

One group who have been subject to the forces of assimilation is that of the Czech-Americans. The Czechs came to the United States seeking opportunities and freedom that could not be achieved in their home lands of Bohemia and Moravia. Many new Czech immigrants made their way to Nebraska where they were able to create a predominant community along with the Germans and other ethnic groups. Though they were determined in their efforts to maintain their ethnic heritage, Czech-Americans were subject to assimilating forces such as language assimilation, intermarriage, and expanding farming practices, which led to the decline in the influence of the Czech identity on future generations.

A Brief History of the Czech Lands and People

Before discussing the growth of the Czech immigrant population and culture within Nebraska and the United States, it is important to take a brief look at the history of the Czech people. The Czech Lands (Bohemia, Moravia, and parts of Silesia) were controlled by the Habsburgs from 1526 to 1918. During the reign of Ferdinand II, the Czech language and culture was almost eliminated for two hundred years, but it was kept alive by Protestant Czech nobles who protested against Ferdinand II's anti-Protestant views.[1] In 1811, Bohemians gained citizenship, but most Bohemians were still tied to the land through landlords and the Catholic Church.[2] In 1867, Bohemia officially became part of the Austria-Hungary Empire and thus its people gained the title of an inferior group of people. This being said, the Austrian government continued to conscript young boys into the military.[3]

When the French Revolution began in that late seventeen hundreds it touched Europeans from every social class including the Czechs. As a result, the Czechs embarked on a mission to uplift national, cultural, and social life and advance their political culture and constitutional status to be able to put themselves at the same level as other European countries.[4] Over the course of the Habsburg and Austrian reigns, Czech identity was jeopardized due to the loss of language as a means of communication in intellectual activity.[5] During this time, there were major clashes between the dominant German language and culture and the Czech language and culture. German was mostly spoken by the elites, but eventually the elites began to consider themselves as Czech and would speak the Czech language.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a renewal in Czech intellectual leadership led to an awakening known as the Národní Obrození (National Revival). To combat the forces

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[1] Hazel Uhlir Devine, *The Changing Winds: One Family's Czech American Experience Circa 1875-1955* (H.U. Devine, 1999), 16
[2] Jaroslav Pánek and Oldřich Tůma, *A History of the Czech Lands* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2009), 285.
[3] Devine, 21.
[4] Joseph G. Svoboda, "Czech-Americans: The Love of Liberty," *Nebraska History* 74, no. 3 & 4 (1993), 110.
[5] Pánek, 295.

working against the Czechs, liberal journalists, writers, politicians, and scholars began teaching countrymen about Czech history and pride thus creating a nationalistic ideology that would be brought with Czech immigrants to the United States.[6] By the end of the nineteenth century, Czechs, along with many other ethnic groups, were defining themselves along national and ethnic lines.

Formation of the Czech Ethnic Community in Nebraska

In the early years of settlement within Nebraska, it was no surprise that settlers faced extreme isolation. Like other immigrants to the Midwest, the Czechs tended to settle near other Czechs who were going through the same experiences. Over time, they were able to form the Czech ethnicity. An ethnicity can be described as, "a basic group identity that is developed over time as it incorporates, adapts, and amplifies preexisting communal solidarities, cultural attributes, and historical memories."[7] Being part of the Czech ethnicity provided Czechs with self-identification, collective consciousness, and a support network.[8] Once a community such as this is established, it is often considered a key factor in an immigrant's ability to successfully adjust to the host country as they provide safe places for immigrants.

For new immigrants, one of the hardest parts of adjusting to life in a new country was deciding what parts of the old life and culture to maintain and which ones would be adopted from the host culture. In the case of immigrants to Lincoln, Nebraska, many sought to preserve old traditions out of respect, which would later be expanded as the need for community

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[6] Svoboda, 111.
[7] Werner Sollors, "Introduction: The Invention of Ethnicity," in The Invention of Ethnicity, ed. Werner Sollors (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1989), ix-x.
[8] Kurt Kinbacher, "Immigration, the American West, and the Twentieth Century: German from Russia, Omaha Indian, and Vietnamese-Urban Villagers in Lincoln, Nebraska," (dissertation, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2006), 12.

acceptance grew.[9] In an urban setting such as Lincoln, utilizing performed culture was one of the most important ways to achieve cultural retention and create an identity that supported separateness. Performed culture such as food, music, language, and celebrations, ended up providing immigrants with a group defense that allowed them to defend themselves against assimilating pressures of the American world.[10] For Czech immigrants, they were not willing to get rid of cultural aspects from their homeland and were determined to maintain their ethnic identity.[11] Philip Taylor explains that, "by holding onto their old traditions, they were able to 'feel safe' in their new country thus making life bearable."[12]

One aspect of Czech life that often changed when coming to the United States was that of religion. By the time Czechs began making their way to the United States, over 90% of Bohemians were Catholic and yet less than half of the Czech immigrants maintained their religious membership.[13] Many were intrigued by the idea of separation of Church and State and the freedom of religion that the United States provided. Maintaining a membership to an organized religion also came with some difficulty as there were no churches or priests in the new settlements of Nebraska. But by the end of the Civil War, the Moravian church had been well-established within the United States. Over time, as the use of the Czech language decreased and with limited resources, churches were unable to seek new recruits from within the Czech and German communities.

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[9] Kinbacher, 15.
[10] Svoboda, 116.
[11] Raymond Douglas Screws, "Tools of Ethnic Identity," *Nebraska History* 88 (2007), 45.
[12] Raymond Douglas Screws, "Retaining Their Culture and Ethnic Identity: Assimilation among Czechs and Swedes in Saunders County, Nebraska, 1880-1910," (dissertation, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2003), 100.
[13] Svoboda, 112.

Many Czech immigrants became Freethinkers. Before 1914, between 40% and 45% of Czech immigrants were Roman Catholic while 55% considered themselves to be freethinking.[14] In general, freethinkers believed in human progress and looked to science before believing in a higher being. Back in the Czech Lands, freethinkers had many political objectives that dated back to the Revolution of 1848 such as extension of civic liberties, absolute separation of church and state, universal suffrage, and the gradual emancipation of women.[15] By 1910, the division of religions among Czech speakers in the United States was over one half freethinker, 40% Catholic, and 5% Protestant.[16]

During the creation of the Czech ethnic community, fraternal organizations played an important role in promoting social awareness. These fraternal organizations were either benevolent orders (fraternal insurance orders) or gymnastic groups (Sokols). The most well-known of the benevolent orders were the Czecho-Slavonic Benevolent Society (Česko Slovanské Podporující Spolky or ČSPS) and the Western Bohemian Fraternal Association (Západní Česka Bratrská Jednota or ZČBJ).[17] At the peak of their existence, there were upwards of forty-two Western Fraternal Association lodges within the United States. For the most part, members of the benevolent orders were freethinkers. The main focus of benevolent orders was to maintain Bohemian customs and language among the younger generations.[18] Many would offer summer schools, held dances, and hosted social events for their members.[19] They also paid a benefit to its members in case of illness or death.[20]

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[14] Bruce M. Garver, "Czech-American Protestants: A Minority Within a Minority," *Nebraska History* 74, no. 3 & 4 (1993), 148.
[15] Ibid., 149.
[16] Ibid., 150.
[17] Svoboda, 113.
[18] Ibid., 117.
[19] Joseph John Van Hoff, "A History of the Czechs in Knox County," (master's thesis, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1938), 23.
[20] Ibid., 22.

Sokols also played a major role in the unity of Czech culture. The main focus of a Sokol was to promote physical training with the motto of "A healthy mind in a healthy body."[21] There were two kinds of Sokols: Catholic Sokols and Non-Catholic Sokols. The Catholic Sokols were called Orels (eagle). These Sokols stressed the importance of moral, spiritual, and physical development. They held regional tournaments, picnics, celebrations, and dances to help benefit local churches.[22] Non-Catholic Sokols were called Tel Jed Sokols and were derived from the ZČBJ. These Sokols held the same values as the Catholic Sokols only they did not stress spiritual and religious activities. Activities included gymnastics, calisthenics, and drills with a focus on maintaining Bohemia traditions and values.[23]

Lastly, Czech newspapers had great influence within the Czech-American community. As Czech immigrants made their way across the United States, they often searched for counselors and leaders. Newspapers provided them with information about Czech settlements and news from the motherland.[24] The first Czech newspaper in Nebraska was the *Pokrok Západu* (Progress of the West), which was first founded in 1871 by Edward Rosewater and was edited by Jan Rosicky. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the popularity of Czech newspapers grew. Between 1860 and 1911, a total of 326 Czech newspaper and journals were published though most were short-lived with some only lasting a year.[25] Many Czech newspapers and journals failed due to the inability of subscribers to pay for their subscriptions.

Assimilation Theory

[21] Van Hoff, 24.
[22] Ibid., 24.
[23] Ibid., 25.
[24] Svoboda, 114.
[25] Ibid., 114.

Before one can further analyze the assimilation of Czech immigrants into American culture, it is important to establish a solid understanding of what assimilation is and the theories behind it. Assimilation can be defined as "the process in which people who can be identified as belonging to the same culture move in the area of a culture foreign to their own and gradually adopt the way of life of the new culture."[26] This definition can be expanded to include different aspects of life as an immigrant. Within assimilation, persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and are thus incorporated into common culture life.[27] In this sense, assimilation can be seen as a way to bring ethnic minorities into mainstream American culture. Assimilation is also referred to as the end stage of the "race relations cycle" that consists of "contact, competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation".[28] Through the various degrees of assimilation, it can affect anywhere from a few people to an entire group of immigrants, but at the same time, it does not necessarily mean an end to one's ethnic group.

To refine our understanding of assimilation, it is important to address how assimilation is measured. Standard measures of assimilation include socioeconomic status (educational attainment, occupational specialization, and parity in earning), spatial concentration (dissimilarity in spatial distribution and of suburbanization), language assimilation (English language ability and loss of mother tongue), and intermarriage.[29] When looking at assimilative progression of an immigrant, it is common to look at time since arrival and the number of generations that has followed him or her. It is generally understood that with increasing duration

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[26] Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, "The Importance of 'Community' in the Process of Immigrant Assimilation," *The International Migration Review* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1966), 5.
[27] Richard D. Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 19.
[28] Ibid., 19.
[29] Mary C. Waters and Tomás R. Jiménez. "Assessing Immigrant Assimilation: New Empirical and Theoretical Challenges," *Annual Review of Sociology* 31, (2005), 107-8.

in the United States and increased familiarity with the behaviors of long term residents immigrants and their descendants tend to resemble the population and shed the distinguishing traits of their ethnicity.[30]

It is also important to look at which variables affect the rate of assimilation. Some of the main variables include group size, concentration, length of residency, and transnational travel.[31] In many cases, a smaller group is more likely to be affected by assimilative forces than a larger group is. We can also look at structural factors such as geographical location and ease of getting back to the motherland. If a group is situated in a rural community or if their children are taught in a language other than English, assimilation can be delayed.[32] In the case of assimilation variables, language, religion, and cultural differences are seen as dissimilative factors. If a group shares the same language, religion, come from a similar culture, and are considered to be "white" by the host society then the group is likely to assimilate more quickly and thoroughly. [33] And lastly, education, occupation, and income can be factors as social class diversity tend to aid in assimilation while homogeneity of social class within an ethnic group can prevent assimilation.

Over the past decade, sociologists and political scientists have gone through the extensive work of defining the individual variations and theories of assimilation. In terms of generational assimilation, assimilation can be divided into straight-line and segmented assimilation. In general, straight-line assimilation follows the belief that immigrants who have spent more time in the host country, along with newer generations, are expected to show greater similarities to the majority population. The process of straight-line assimilation is normally considered to be complete by the third generation. Generational steps taken with every new generation represents

[30] Sharon L. Sassler, "School Participation among Immigrant Youths: The Case of Segmented Assimilation in the Early 20th Century," *Sociology of Education* 79, no. 1 (Jan., 2006), 3.
[31] Charlie V. Morgan, *Intermarriage Across Race and Ethnicity among Immigrants* (El Paso: LFB Publishing, 2009), 23.
[32] Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 108.
[33] Morgan, 24.

a new stage of adjustment into the host society and is thus one step further from ethnic "ground zero" (the ethnic community established by the first immigrants).[34] Segmented assimilation, on the other hand, deals with immigrants who fail to achieve status mobility and thus have fewer resources and lower levels of human capital through which they can assimilate.[35] This form of assimilation is caused by barriers such as discrimination in schooling and employment. These immigrants tend to be concentrated in poorer areas.

A number of assimilation theories have formed over time: acculturation, psychological assimilation, social assimilation, structural assimilation, and Americanization. Like the name suggests, acculturation deals with the changing of a culture. In the case of acculturation, immigrants adopt the values, norms, patterns of behavior, and expectations of the host society.[36] Acculturation can thus be divided into three sub categories: alternation, multiculturality, and fusion. Alternation is when there is no visible hierarchical relationship between the cultures in question.[37] Multiculturality is when an individual is influenced by multiple cultures that work together to serve common functions instead of operating separately. And lastly, fusion is when cultures that share common economic, political and/or geographic space blend together to form a new common culture. While acculturation is taking place, psychological assimilation may also be taking place as members of two groups move towards a single ethnic self-concept and sense of peoplehood.[38]

The next form of assimilation to be addressed is that of social assimilation. Social assimilation pertains to a group of immigrants being absorbed into the host society where they

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[34] Alba and Nee, 27.
[35] Sassler, 4.
[36] Fitzpatrick, 5.
[37] Doughui Zhang, *Between Two Generations: Language Maintenance and Acculturation among Chinese Immigrant Families* (El Paso, Texas: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2008), 12-14.
[38] Allen J. Williams, Jr., David R. Johnson, and Miguel A. Carranza, "Ethnic Assimilation and Pluralism in Nebraska," in *Ethnicity on the Great Plains*, ed. Frederick C. Luebke (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 211.

are thus accepted as members of the social groups and engage in host society activities.[39] In this case, only one culture exists. The next theory is that of structural assimilation in which multiple cultures exist while covering a wide range of cultural values and behavioral patterns. Within structural assimilation, each group has their own networks of cliques, clubs, organizations, and institutions that restrict the contacts of its members to within the ethnic group.[40] Most of the time, interethnic contact occurs on the levels of employment, political, and civic processes. But in many cases, structural assimilation does not last very long as many second generations feel the pull of the host society.

Lastly, it is important to discuss the theory of Americanization. Americanization encompasses the idea that all newcomers from foreign lands must quickly rid themselves of their old culture and completely take on the language, customs, hopes, and aspirations of the American culture and thus eliminate all ethnic distinctions.[41] The theory of Americanization works to make sure that every immigrant conforms to the American way of life and becomes an American citizen. Immigrants often have little say in what constitutes a "proper American" as the job normally goes to those who are a native to the United States and who have been assimilated themselves.[42] Americanization processes effectively work to develop knowledge, ideas, social attitudes, conceptions of laws, order, government, duty, freedom, and the meaning of life. The end goal of this theory is to create an attitude that promotes a willingness to serve the United States and become a naturalized citizen.

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[39] Fitzpatrick, 6.
[40] Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 110.
[41] Isaac B. Berkson, *Theories of Americanization: A Critical Study* (Teacher's College: Columbia University, 1920), 55.
[42] Ibid., 68.

Proponents of Americanization find justification through the need for national unity.[43] They tend to believe that if individuals act with other's interests in mind, then it will help to promote like-mindedness. These common interests are then translated into common purposes that are communicated through a common language. This allows for discussion of common problems and participation in common tasks.[44] By having like-mindedness, the country is able to promote national sameness that hides internal disunities. Sameness is effectively centered on outward conformity and the cultivation of a national identity. To do this, people must look alike, dress alike, and speak the same language.

This desire for conformity was heightened by public opinion during World War I as many feared that national unity may be undermined by immigrants' "conflicting loyalties".[45] During this time, promoting differences implied divergences.[46] In the 1910s and 20s, mainstream Americans expected immigrants to acculturate themselves with American norms and mores.[47] When they failed to do so in a prompt fashion, they were criticized and further marginalized.

Over the years, three different social ideological positions formed: Anglo-conformity, melting pot, and cultural pluralism. People who follow Anglo-conformity tend to believe that immigrants must fully renounce their ancestral culture in favor of Anglo-Saxon values and behavior.[48] One of the most historically significant cases of Anglo-conformity occurred during the reign of Adolf Hitler as he believed in the superiority of the Aryan race. Under Anglo-conformity, "Nordic" and "Aryan" racial superiority is believed to exist while Nativist political

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[43] Berkson, 64.
[44] Ibid., 64.
[45] Rosemary C. Salomone, *True American: Language, Identity, and the Education of Immigrant Children* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), 30.
[46] Berkson, 66.
[47] Kinbacher, 17.
[48] Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 85.

programs and exclusionist immigration policies are put in place to control other races and ethnicities.

The idea of the United States as a "melting pot" is commonly known among Americans. This position pertains to the idea of a biological merger of Anglo-Saxon peoples with other immigrant groups and the subsequent blending of their cultures into a single American culture.[49] This idea was popular during the early twentieth century as the number of immigrants grew. But at the same time, it was in constant competition with Anglo-conformity.

The last form of ideological position toward assimilation is that of cultural pluralism. Cultural pluralism was first proposed by Horace Kallen, an American philosopher. He believed that immigrants should be allowed to maintain their ancestral cultural while still being able to incorporate into American society.[50] As a result, the host society would accept and embrace the cultural differences. Milton Gordon, an American sociologist, believed that society would be able to benefit from the different ethnic elements while the immigrants maintained their cultural distinctiveness.[51]

During the 1920's, Isaac Berkson, a Jewish philosopher, presented a critical view of Americanization, assimilation, and the melting pot ideology as he felt that it led to the obliteration of ethnic distinction.[52] He believed that immigrants and minority groups had the right to preserve their own identity. Berkson proposed a community theory in which groups like these would be able to share a common economic and political life, while co-existing alongside mainstream American culture. Assimilation would be acceptable as long as freedom of choice was maintained.

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[49] Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 85.
[50] Morgan, 24.
[51] Alba and Nee, 26.
[52] George E. Pozzetta, *Education and the Immigrant* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 192.

The variables that affect the effectiveness of Americanization programs can be broken up into two groups: subjective and objective. A subjective variable is that of convenience of unity. Different nationalities often find it hard to live and work together without having some form of common basis to live by.[53] Immigrants come to show ambition towards living a life like that of their American neighbors. Objective variables include permanent settlement, purchasing a home or land, economic life, transformation of children, and intermarriage. All of these variables naturally take place most rapidly where contacts are primary and where immigrants are most likely to engage in intimate and intense connections.[54] In effect, living under American institutions where they are able to advance economically, receive education, and receive a higher degree of freedom helps to assimilate immigrants into American society.[55]

While discussing the theories behind immigrant assimilation, it is important to mention the assimilation that naturally occurs within ethnic groups over time. Ethnic groups tend to change over the course of generations as cultural experiences become eroded.[56] For this reason, it is not hard to see why generations closest to arrival maintain cultural practices and ethnic identity longer than those who are farther away. For later generations, ethnic identity is often redefined to serve their needs. Cultural practices are transformed. Many ethnic customs that have been maintained often show up around the holidays but are not maintained in everyday life.[57]

But in the end, preservation of an ethnic culture and identity greatly depends on the individual and their unique circumstances. For an immigrant to maintain their ethnic heritage, they must possess the desire to retain their ethnic identity as well as have connections with other people from the motherland. As assimilation works its way through an ethnic group, boundaries

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[53] Berkson, 70.
[54] Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 62.
[55] Kenneth Miller, *The Czecho-Slovaks in America* (Miller, South Dakota: Miller Press, 2007), 110.
[56] Kinbacher, 17.
[57] Ibid., 17.

are constantly being renegotiated to reshape immigrant cultures.[58] This natural assimilation that occurs within ethnic groups along with Americanization and the other forms of assimilation do not always spread evenly through immigrant groups.

Assimilation and Language

When looking at language assimilation it is important to look at the history of the concept within the United States. During the mid eighteen hundreds, Americans were predominantly mainstream Protestant and English-speaking citizens.[59] Leading up to this point, there had been a level of tolerance towards the languages of the early settlers who had not been British (such as the Dutch, French, German, and Spanish immigrants). Laws were passed to allow foreign language instruction in schools in some states. As immigration from Germany and other European countries increased, Germans felt the need to maintain their language within the schools and repeatedly requested that federal laws and documents to be printed in German. This, along with the spread of the German press and cultural institutions, contributed to the rise of nativism within the United States.[60]

There tended to be two different views on the subject of immigrants and knowledge of the English language. Some believed that immigrants could simply add English to their linguistic repertoire rather than completely abandoning their mother language.[61] In this case, forcing English upon immigrants was seen as counterproductive. Others adopted the English-first policy which later became the English-only policy following the Great Depression.[62] This idea was

[58] Kevin Hannan, "Refashioning Ethnicity in Czech-Moravian Texas," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25, no. 1 (Fall 2005), 32.
[59] Salomone, 16.
[60] Ibid., 17.
[61] Hannan, 34.
[62] Salomone, 17.

supported as English became the official language of the United States in 1918 under President Harding. These beliefs progressed during and after World War II as anti-German and anxieties over massive immigration rose. Being proficient in a foreign language was considered to be "incompatible with the American identity" for newly arrived immigrants.[63]

In the early twentieth century, P.P. Claxton, the Commissioner of Education, warned that immigrants who had "little kinship with the older stocks of our population, either in blood, language, methods of thought, traditions, manners, or customs," and knew "little of our political and civic life," and were "unused to our social ideals," were a lightning rod for concerns.[64] Claxton and many others were concerned with the ability of immigrants to blend into society. It was believed that if immigrant communities maintained their own languages and/or have not learned enough English then it would be impossible for them to blend into American social life.

As immigrants adapted to life in the United States and attempted to resist assimilation, they were faced with two main questions: whether to maintain their heritage language and whether or not to shift to the host culture. In previous decades, parents had felt obligated to pass on their heritage language to their children.[65] But by the middle of the twentieth century, fewer parents saw any need in passing it on. This phenomenon resulted from the interwar period as many people developed extended social networks that went beyond their ethnic communities and thus requiring them to speak English.[66] In some cases, a heritage language was seen as inappropriate.

Whether or not to maintain a heritage language is a very important aspect of ethnic life that develops over the course of several generations. In general, language maintenance is

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[63] Hannan, 35.
[64] Salomone, 15.
[65] Hannan, 40.
[66] Ibid., 40.

considered to be a three generation process. The first generation normally learns as much English as they can, but tend to speak their mother language in the house. Second generations speak the mother language in the house but will shift to an unaccented English while at school and at work.[67] By the third generation, English is spoken in the home and the mother language has all but disappeared. For younger generations, maintenance of mother languages help to retain their distinctive culture and better control the rate at which they adapt to mainstream American culture.[68] This helps to promote ethnic consciousness. It is in this manner that mother languages can serve as social divides within ethnic communities by separating those who know the language from those who do not. If a person has an accent or uses non-English words in English speech then it is seen as a signal of their ethnic origins and is a repository of ethnic cultural knowledge.[69]

Language attitudes and ideologies play a large role in language maintenance. Common language attitudes include: language as a problem, language as a right, and language as a resource.[70] Language ideology is a set of beliefs about language that is articulated by users as a rationalization or justification for the language structure. Another factor that affects language maintenance is that of mobility level. If an immigrant is able to be mobile without interacting with Anglo institutions or with highly diversified urban immigrant populations then they are able to escape full language assimilation for longer than immigrants in other situations.[71] Connections can also be made within family practices. Changes in role relations and ethnic beliefs tend to be effects of anti-ethnic industrial efficiency, monetary commensurability, and materialism.[72]

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[67] Zhang, 10.
[68] Salomone, 17.
[69] Richard D. Alba, *Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White America* (Yale University Press, 2003), 10.
[70] Zhang, 21.
[71] Joshua A. Fishman, "The Third Century of Non-English Language Maintenance and Non-Anglo Ethnic Maintenance in the United States of America," *TESOL Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (Sept. 1973), 224.
[72] Ibid., 224.

Lastly, it is important to look at how long a person or ethnic group has been away from the motherland. As soon as an immigrant arrives in a new land, their speech begins to develop independently of their heritage language.[73] The heritage language, thus becomes isolated. Over time, an immigrant's heritage language is molded and their language skills deteriorate. Heritage languages tend to move towards simpler versions.[74] This idea is referred to in the wave hypothesis which proposes that language change originates at a specific place and time and then spreads simultaneously throughout society.[75] Social, cultural, and linguistic changes tend to spread from a cultural or political center. These innovations and changes take away from traditional ways of life and marginalize the heritage language and culture.[76]

[73] Antonín Vašek, "On Language Acculturation in American Czechs," *Brno Studies in English* 22 (1996), 73.
[74] Hannan, 33.
[75] Ibid., 32.
[76] Zhang, 3.

Census records aid in the understanding of Czech immigration to the United States and language maintenance. Figure 1 shows that, up until the 1930's, Czech immigration to the United States was on the rise and then consistently decreased afterwards. The sharp decrease that can be seen is in part due to the limitations placed on immigration, such as the National Origins Act of 1924, along with the initiation of World War II. Following the war, the Communist regime of Czechoslovakia banned immigration to Western countries.[77] This decrease in the arrival of new Czech immigrants greatly affected the maintenance of the Czech language within the United States as it was maintained less and less. Despite this fact, both Czech-Americans and Czechs within the Austria-Hungary Empire viewed the maintenance of the Czech language as a way to keep the Czech nation alive. In a summer 2017 interview, Mila Šašková-Pierce, a Czech language professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, explained that knowledge of the Czech language ultimately became an indicator of membership in the national Czech community.[78]

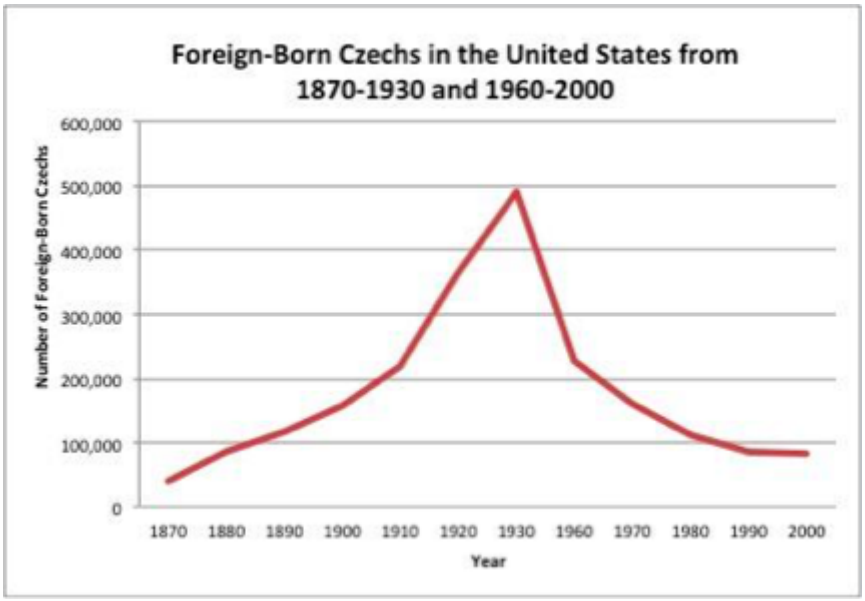

Figure 1 shows United States census data collected from 1870-1930 and 1960-2000.

[77] Marta McCabe, "Czech and Slovak Mothers Struggling to Maintain Children's Heritage Language in North Carolina," in *Immigration and Education in North Carolina: The Challenges and Responses in a New Gateway States*, ed. Xue Lan Rong and Jeremy Hilburn (Boston: Sense Publishers, 2017), 243.
[78] Mila Šašková-Pierce, interviewed by Katie Meegan, June 12, 2017.

For first generation Czechs, the language facilitated the transmission of knowledge to Czechs who could not yet speak English.[79] Czech-American newspapers added in the spread of information on farming practices, health, and other information that helped immigrants to become successful American citizens while also allowing for the continuation of their ethnic culture and language. In effect, Czechs developed a sense of pride in their ability to speak the mother language and be able to pass it on to their children.[80] Second generation Czechs tended to be very proficient in the Czech language. Many organized Czech classes at elementary and high schools. Today, second generation Czechs are often members of Czech organizations and promote Czech festivals and ethnic activities.[81] Many of the third generation Czech-Americans who were born during the 1920's have views of their mother language and culture that is affected by their experiences with American hostility towards "new immigration". Thus, most third generation Czech-Americans only know a few words and phrases of the Czech language. And lastly, fourth generation Czechs tend to not know any Czech.

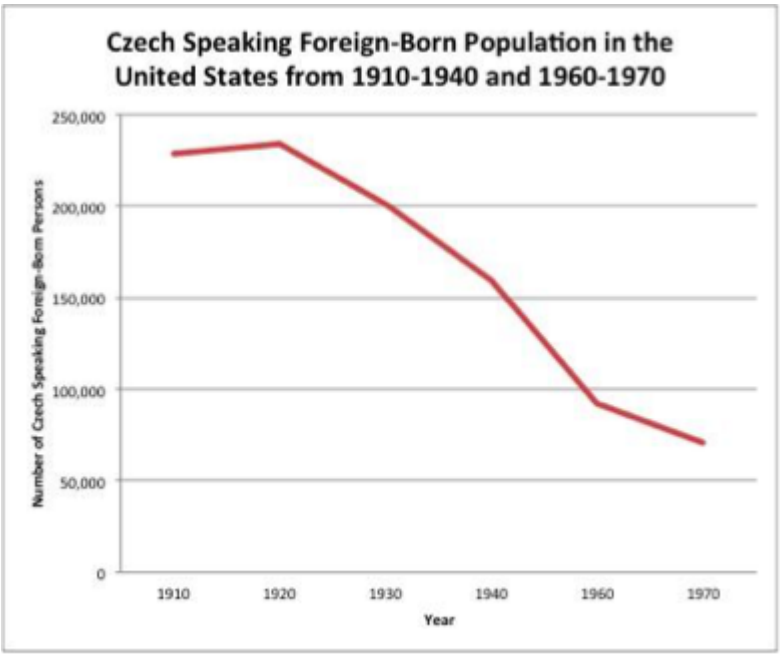

Figure 2 shows data collected by United States census records from the years 1910-1940 an 1960-1970.

[79] Mila Šašková-Pierce, "Czech-Language Maintenance in Nebraska." *Nebraska History* 74, no. 3 &4 (1993), 210.
[80] Ibid., 213.
[81] Ibid., 213.

One of the trends that can be seen from the 1910s through the 1970s is the decrease in the amount of new Czech immigrants to the United States. While Czech newcomers to the United States knew that they would have to give up some aspects of their cultural heritage, many showed little interest in dropping their use of the Czech language.

Foreign language press was a very useful tool for many immigrants. During the first part of the twentieth century, foreign language press had a large cultural and educational presence within immigrant communities.[82] By 1920, there were 140 dailies, 594 weeklies, and 109 monthlies within the foreign language press circulation. These newspapers and journals helped to provide reports about the motherland, news about other immigrants within the area, and announcements of cultural and religious events.[83] They also provided information about how to adapt to American life and culture, thus becoming bridges to successful Americanization. Czech newspapers and journals played a large role in the Czech community as 150,000 Czechs subscribed to at least one Czech newspaper or journal (159,891 Czechs by 1900 census).[84] In Nebraska, Czech newspapers were being published in Omaha, Wilber, Clarkson, and Schuyler. During the twentieth century, leaders of the Americanization education campaigns recognized the power and influence of the foreign language press and started actively recruiting editors and publishers to become involved in the efforts to unify the country.[85] These assimilation and Americanization efforts helped lead to the phasing out of Czech language, books, newspapers, and other periodicals.

Language assimilation has also affected ethnic children. Over time, younger generations tended to know English and only know a little of their parents' heritage language, while their

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[82] Jeffrey E. Mirel, *Patriotic Pluralism: Americanization Education and European Immigrants* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), 102.
[83] Ibid., 102.
[84] Šašková-Pierce, 209.
[85] Mirel, 103.

parents knew very little English.[86] And often times the youngest children would speak the heritage language more poorly than their older siblings. This can be explained through the progression of a family's presence in the United States, the desires of the parents, and the wills of the children. When the first child is born, parents tend to be monolingual, but, by the time the other children are born, the parents have acquired knowledge of the English language.[87] The younger children no longer have any need for the heritage language when communicating with their parents and siblings. Many children have the advantage of learning the American ways of thinking, standards of conduct, and cultural ways of life through the school system and interactions with other children. This becomes a problem as it represents a break in their parents' influence. For families to be successful, it is imperative that parents learn English or make an attempt at learning the ways of Americans.[88] Šašková-Pierce passed the Czech language down to her two daughters. The oldest embraced the Czech language and tends to be more engaged in the Czech culture than her youngest who refuses to speak Czech and has "chosen to be an American."

The assimilation of children, especially when it came to language, was an important aspect of the American education system during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Because a majority of children went through the public school system, schools ended up serving as an incubator for social and cultural adaptation and also helped to reduce the impacts of mass migration on national unity and identity.[89] Teachers and administrators united together to help

[86] Miller, 73.
[87] Thomas Čapek, *The Čechs (Bohemians) in America: A Study of Their National, Cultural, Political, Social, Economic and Religious Life* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920)„ 103.
[88]`Miller, 73.
[89] Salomone, 15 and 27.

children adapt American standards. To do this, they Americanized their names, their tastes in food, their clothing, and their outlook on life.[90]

The rise of the common school movement began in the early nineteenth century. Schools adopted the purpose of providing socialization opportunities for children according to patterns of acceptable thought and behavior.[91] The schools provided a way to transmit norms and values across generations. But they ultimately reflected the interests of those who possessed economic and social power as they sought to assimilate minority groups into American society.[92] By the 1890's, educators were calling for stronger compulsory education laws to get immigrant children into the public schools so that they could learn English, history, American traditions, and government. But even with the increase in the number of new students between the 1890's and the 1900's, no major changes were made to the curriculum.[93]

During the twentieth century, there were two main factors that shaped the American educational system. The first was the large, steady stream of new immigrants. By 1920, 13.2 percent of the population was foreign-born with an even larger proportion having at least one foreign-born parent.[94] For a long time, Europeans made up over a majority of immigrants to the United States. From the mid 1800's to the mid 1900's, Europeans consisted of anywhere from 75% to 92% of all immigrants to the United States. As mentioned before, immigrant origins shifted during the late nineteenth century from western and northern Europeans to eastern and southern Europeans. These new immigrants tended to differ in their rates of literacy, their ability to speak English, and their familiarity with the skills needed to succeed in an urban

[90] Salomone, 27.
[91] Pozzetta, 187.
[92] Ibid., 187.
[93] Mirel, 51.
[94] Sassler, 2.

environment.[95] The foreign-born and second generation ethnic population grew so much that by 1909, 58% of the students in thirty-seven of the country's largest cities had foreign-born parents.[96]

The second factor that helped to shape the American educational system was the need to acculturate students and cultivate conformity. This factor became important to many as fears grew during the world wars. Many states passed legislation that called for the creation of evening classes that would teach English and citizenship to immigrant adults, along with courses on civics and American democracy to immigrant children.[97] Some states, including Rhode Island and Utah, fined immigrants who could not attend the classes.

Many who supported the public schools considered learning English to be an important aspect of Americanization, but it did not always go as smoothly or as quickly as had been anticipated.[98] During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the German-American population pushed to allow the German language to be taught in the public schools. Many Americans reacted strongly against the idea thus causing the concept of foreign language teaching in the public schools to become a source of controversy.[99] To solve the problem, legislation was created to put an end to foreign languages in public schools. The enforcement of this legislation was rather inconsistent on the local levels. German language instruction in public schools came to an end in 1918 when school boards voted to end all German language programs.[100] The ban of German language programs helped lead to more bans on teaching foreign languages. By 1919, fifteen states had passed legislation that prohibited public schools

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[95] Sassler, 2.
[96] Salomone, 23.
[97] Ibid., 34.
[98] Susan Jean Kuyper, "The Americanization of German Immigrants: Language, Religion and Schools in Nineteenth Century Rural Wisconsin" (dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1980), 117.
[99] Ibid., 117.
[100] Mirel, 23.

from teaching regular school subjects in languages other than English.[101] In some cases, legislation such as these led to problems on the federal level. One legislation in Nebraska made it all the way to the Supreme Court in the case of Meyer v. Nebraska (1923). The verdict struck down the state law restricting foreign-language education and allowed ethnic groups to maintain dual-language private and parochial schooling.[102] This case established the legal principle that the maintenance of mother languages was compatible with the Constitution and Americanism.

But concerns grew even after the abolition of foreign language programs. Suspicions of immigrant loyalties grew and led to the launch of an extensive national campaign to Americanize all non-naturalized adult immigrants.[103] During World War I, school leaders' main concern was to promote national unity as their duty to the war effort. To do this, they worked to increase linguistic uniformity by banning the teaching of German in the public elementary schools and ramping up efforts to infuse "100 percent Americanism".[104]

In 1915, the push for Americanization within the schools was considered a community builder as many organizations came together to bolster patriotism of newly naturalized citizens and encourage the naturalization of the six million immigrants who had not yet applied for citizenship.[105] The National Americanization Committee encouraged organizations to promote educational activities that were related to naturalization and national unity. By 1923, thirty-four states had enacted legislation mandating that English be the sole language of instruction in both public and private schools, though many of these laws were overturned with the Meyer v. Nebraska verdict.[106] Supporters of these laws claimed that foreign language instruction would impair the cognitive ability of children and thus be harmful to them. Those in opposition to these

[101] Mirel, 60.
[102] Ibid., 60.
[103] Ibid., 23.
[104] Ibid., 59.
[105] Ibid., 24.
[106] Ibid., 34.

laws believed that forcing English upon the students would be counterproductive and would provoke opposition.[107]

Either way, administrators and teachers were not fully prepared for the influx of immigrant and ethnic children. These ethnic and racial minorities came to the schools with different languages, cultures, traditions, and values.[108] Teachers and administrators found themselves dealing with issues they had never dealt with such as lice, manners, cleanliness, appropriate dress, accommodating older students with limited to no prior schooling, providing lunch to children who were poorly nourished, navigating foreign cultures and attitudes towards formal education, and communicating with parents who did not speak English.[109] Because of these reasons, the socialization and assimilation of minorities was seen as important for maintenance of social order and cohesion. Schools adopted the goal of securing conformity and breaking down ethnic and racial cultures. To many Americans, immigrants brought with them little that was worth saving.[110] Most schools provided no provisions for non-English speaking children and made no effort to hire teachers with ethnic backgrounds or who were multilingual.

To deal with the problems of assimilation, schools enforced many methods to teach American values. For younger children, playgrounds were seen as ways to encourage children to follow rules, engage in fair play, and support teamwork.[111] Immigrant children played games such as baseball and basketball. Elementary art classes helped to reinforce Americanization by assigning art projects on George Washington's and Abraham Lincoln's birthday and creating Mother's Day and Valentine's Day cards.[112]

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[107] Mirel, 36.
[108] Pozzetta, 188.
[109] Salomone, 24.
[110] Pozzetta, 189.
[111] Mirel, 54.
[112] Ibid., 56.

As children made their way through the American education system, the attempts to Americanize them continued. High school courses focused on English, history, and civics while looking at the works of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants.[113] History classes put emphasis on presidents, national politics, laws, and wars. Textbooks tended to be monocultural. While these practices were promoted across the country, not all people believed that this was the best way to depict the United States. In 1920, Edward McSweeney from the Knights of Columbus denounced the Anglo-Saxon bias found in American history textbooks explaining that the nation's history should demonstrate the "composite" character of the United States and highlight the diverse peoples and cultures that shaped the nation.[114]

Even as teachers and administrators attempted to control immigrant and ethnic children, they still ran into difficulties, thus strategies were introduced to shorten the assimilation period. "Steamer" or "C" classes were created in cities such as New York, Cleveland, and Detroit where non-English speaking children were given a period of time (six weeks to six months) to learn enough English to function in society.[115] But not all schools were as accommodating. The more common strategy for dealing with immigrant and ethnic children was complete immersion in an English classroom with a teacher who only spoke English. In effect, many immigrant and ethnic children were held back thus encouraging them to drop out.[116]

Night school tended to be the most productive way of Americanizing the children's parents. Many believed that it was impossible to educate immigrant children in English, ideals,

[113] Mirel, 56.
[114] Ibid., 65.
[115] Salomone, 25.
[116] Ibid., 25.

and habits if they returned in the evening to an ethnically isolated community where the heritage language was spoken and there was no contact with American mores.[117]

Before the wars, many immigrants were eager to put their children into the American mainstream and showed little resistance to the "cultural evangelism" of the schools.[118] Views changed following the World War I and II as ethnic groups called for more inclusive views of American history and culture. Ethnic groups took pride in the large numbers of men from their communities who had loyally served in the American armed forces.[119] During the wars, 18% of the United States military were immigrants. By doing so, they were denouncing ethnic nationalism in favor of an American identity based on commitment to American ideals and values.

Through administrators' and teachers' attempts to Americanize immigrants and their children, it is no surprise that it was not a very good experience for those affected. In many cases, their languages and cultures were degraded, their names were Americanized, they were forced to conform to American patterns of behavior, and they were subject to daily doses of patriotism.[120] Some ethnic groups ended up rejecting the American education system all together. Parents would pull their children out of school before the legal age of fourteen to work.[121] Truancy rates tended to be high as compulsory attendance laws were unevenly enforced.

As a result, some immigrant groups set up their own schools where the group's history, language, and religious traditions could be maintained. After school programs, such as church

[117] Salomone, 28.
[118] Ibid., 27.
[119] Mirel, 64.
[120] Pozzetta, 188.
[121] Ibid., 190.

schools and folk schools, were popular. But these foreign language schools only served a small percentage of immigrant children.[122]

Czech immigrants were no different when it came to establishing ethnic schools for their children. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, fewer than half of all Czechs in the country could speak English, which led to the rapid development of Czech schools.[123] While Czech parents wanted their children to learn Czech and read Czech literature, they also wanted their children to be able to read and write English. J.W. Kaura tells the story of a schoolhouse in 1878 near Wilber, Nebraska where half of the children were Czech.[124] He talks about how the children would have breaks in their English and would often be gone for the harvest. As much as the parents wanted their children to learn English, the harvest took precedence. At one point, one teacher hosted a picnic where children were allowed to invite their mothers, even though most of them did not know English.[125] Free Schools were also a popular option among Czechs. By the turn of century, there were sixteen Free Schools in Nebraska.[126] At these schools, teachers taught Czech language, history, and literature in the hope of developing freethinking minds and rational judgement. In some cases, these schools received support from the local Western Bohemian Fraternal Association. Americanization was also a concern of Czech-Americans. Evening classes teaching citizenship and English to Czech immigrants began in 1904.[127]

World War I was ultimately seen as the initial declining period for Czech immigration, language, and culture. During this time, the number of second generation Czechs increased

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[122] Salomone, 27.
[123] Devine, 106.
[124] J.W. Kaura, *Saline County, Nebraska: History Beginning in 1858* (DeWitt, Nebraska: 1962), 53.
[125] Dolores Kokes Speidel, *My Life as it Was: The Nebraska Memories, Dodge and Stanton Counties 1881-1909, of Barbara Luxa Hamsa (September 21, 1879-August 17, 1952)*(Minneapolis: 2003), V10.
[126] Bruce M. Garver, "Czech-American Freethinkers on the Great Plains," in *Ethnicity on the Great Plains*, ed. Frederick C. Luebke (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 156.
[127] Czechoslovak National Council of America, *Panorama: A Historical Review of Czechs and Slovaks in the United States of America* (Czechoslovak National Council of America, 1970), 45.

leading to a decline in the Czech language.[128] During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, second generation Czechs became more comfortable with the English language. While many second generation Czechs spoke English exclusively, others were unwilling to lose their uniqueness and cease belonging to the Czech culture.[129]

Another factor that led to the decline in the Czech language was that of anti-foreign feelings during World War I. These feelings effectively discouraged younger ethnic generations from expanding their knowledge of the Czech language and culture.[130] The teaching of Czech in schools was also affected due to the lack of interest and Americanization. Some blamed the Freethinkers who did not teach all their classes in Czech and held poorly attended evening Czech classes.[131]

As the younger generations began to place greater importance on learning English and less importance on maintaining their ethnic heritage, older generations developed a concern for whether or not their children cared about the motherland of their parents. Many of the younger Czechs, who had been born in the United States, felt as if they belonged to the United States.[132] They were being schooled in the United States and their mother tongue was English. Their personality and spirit was a mix of Anglo-Saxon and Slavic traits. Compared to older generation Czech-Americans, they were different.

Assimilation and Farming Practices

[128] Svoboda, 117.
[129] Šašková-Pierce, 211.
[130] Svoboda, 117.
[131] Ivan Dubovický, "Czech-Americans: An Ethnic Dilemma," *Nebraska History* 74, no. 3 & 4 (1993), 205.
[132] Čapek, *The Čechs*, 101.

Agriculture was a very important part of Great Plains immigrant life during the nineteenth century. Many newcomers had heard about the bountiful land that the Great Plains had to offer through relatives and friends who had settled in an area and were eager to have neighbors of their own kind.[133] Immigrants also heard about the land through advertisements in foreign newspapers and through real estate men.

When deciding on where to settle down in a new country many immigrants looked to communities that were composed of people who were of the same culture and who were going through the same experiences as they were. By doing this, immigrants effectively created ethnicities. An ethnicity can be described as a basic group identity that develops over time as it incorporates, adapts, and amplifies preexisting communal solidarities, cultural attributes, and historical memories.[134] To the immigrants who settled on the plains of Nebraska, ethnicity provided important functions that aided in their success in the new land. Ethnicity provided a source of group self-identification and collective consciousness, support networks and institutions, and allowed members to interact with mainstream society without having to become full members.[135] Ethnic communities effectively became the backbone of early rural life in the Great Plains.

As they settled down, immigrants engaged in agricultural practices that they had brought with them from their mother country and, as a result, created a unique form of farmer. Immigrants modified their farming practices to work on the new soil and conditions.[136] But over time, many of the differences between European and American agricultural practices disappeared

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[133] Edmund Brunner, *Immigrant Farmers and Their Children* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929), 32.
[134] Sollors, ix-x.
[135] Kinbacher, 12.
[136] Bradley H. Baltensperger, "Agricultural Change among Nebraska Immigrants: 1880-1900," in *Ethnicity on the Great Plains*, ed. Frederick C. Luebke (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 173.

as they started to reflect a blend of adopted and retained practices.[137] Many immigrant farmers chose to plant fewer crops that were harder to grow and required larger amounts of people to maintain. For nineteenth century Midwestern immigrant farmers, corn became the most important crop.[138] This was the case even though Europeans had little experience with the crop.

By the 1920's, immigrant farming had grown to be more specialized than native-born American farming. Even though immigrants often occupied inferior soils, their farms compared favorably with farms of native-borns in terms of the value of their farms and the ownership rates.[139] It was proposed that these differences between native and immigrant farmers was in their attitudes towards the land. The Immigration Act of 1924 gave preference to immigrants and their families who were skilled in agriculture. The number of immigrant farmers increased following the creation of the act. Between 1910 and 1914, the number of immigrant farmers was at 57,000 with an increase to 75,000 by 1924.[140]

When Czech immigrants made their way to the United States, many ended up going into agriculture. Back in Bohemia, Czechs often dealt with inadequate land resources.[141] Over the preceding centuries, Czechs had become used to the scarcity of land. They developed the skills of self-sufficiency and land preservation as a matter of necessity.[142] One of the major pulls to the United States, especially to Midwestern states, was that of the plethora of bountiful land. The idea of owning their own land was overwhelming. Czechs were able to find homestead land that was attractive and fertile.[143] But to the Czechs, land ownership meant more than just a way of sustainability. In Europe, respect and honor was given to landowners. Land ownership also

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[137] Baltensperger, 186.
[138] Ibid., 174.
[139] Brian Q. Cannon, "Immigrants in American Agriculture," *Agricultural History* 65, no. 1 (Winter 1991), 19.
[140] Brunner, 27.
[141] Robert L. Skrabanek, "The Influence of Cultural Backgrounds on Farming Practices in a Czech-American Rural Community," *The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Mar., 1951), 260.
[142] Russell W. Lynch, "Czech Farmers in Oklahoma," *Economic Geography* 20, no. 1 (Jan., 1944), 11.
[143] Joseph Chada. *The Czechs in the United States*, (Washington, D.C.: SVU Press, 1981), 37.

offered a sense of security to newcomers that was able to compensate for the confusion, anxiety, and rootlessness that immigrants felt as they adjusted to life in the United States.[144]

Czech farmers and other ethnic farmers in the Midwest were often isolated in the beginning years of immigration due to bad weather and road conditions that prevented them from making trips into town.[145] Nevertheless, Czechs were able to farm more land than they would have been able to in Bohemia. In Saline County, Nebraska, the typical farm size ranged from 16 to 64 hectares.[146] Over time, farming grew into much more than a lifestyle for Czechs. The farming way of life became thoroughly indoctrinated in the sons and grandsons. Younger generations were taught about the Czech attitudes and traditions concerning agricultural practices and techniques that often held Old World characteristics.[147] Czechs were known for planting oats, wheat, and barley. They tended to use crop rotations that were also more complex.[148]

Czech farmers created networks where they were able to cooperate with other farmers in the area. Swapping labor and farming equipment between neighbors became a common practice. Neighbors often chipped in to help sick neighbors with their crops.[149] Practices like these are even seen today in communities such as Snook, Texas where over half of the farmers in the area swap labor and 40 percent of farmers own farm equipment cooperatively with another farmer.[150] It is practices like these that have aided in Czech farming stability.

Over time, Czech-American farmers have been able to maintain their position in American agriculture. By 1900, 156,549 Czech-Americans lived in rural areas.[151] This

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[144] Chada, 37.
[145] Devine, 120.
[146] E.A Kral, *A Selected History of Wilber and Czech Culture in Nebraska, 1873-1997* (Wilber, Nebraska: 1997), 40.
[147] Skrabanek, The Influence of, 260.
[148] Lynch, 10.
[149] Robert L. Skrabanek, "Forms of Cooperation and Mutual Aid in a Czech-American Rural Community," *The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (Dec., 1949), 184.
[150] Ibid., 184.
[151] Chada, 37.

sustainability can be seen in the case of Lincoln County, Oklahoma. Over the first half of the twentieth century, the county farms had seen abandonment, poverty, and high tenancy, but the Czechs were able to show a higher degree of stability than that of the native population.[152] During the 1930's and 40's, ethnic groups partaking in agriculture in the county lost anywhere from 16.5 to 23.1 percent of their population while the Czechs only lost 1.2 percent with little help from the government. During this time, only 3.7 percent of Czechs in the county were certified for W.P.A (Works Progress Administration) employment compared to 26.6 percent of other farmers in the county.[153]

Czech-Americans were also able to maintain stability through their constant supply of labor. Some Czech family farms had three generations working at one time. In order to maintain the Czech way of farming, some families in Texas moved to Nueces where they were able to escape the changing agriculture of central Texas and indoctrinate future generations with the Czech way of farming.[154] But in many cases, Czech families lived on their farms longer than any other farmers in their area.

Czech-American farmers have been stubborn when it comes assimilation into the American ways of farming. The way in which they have passed down the traditional Czech ways of farming and worked to create a network of cooperative farming has helped aid in Czech-American farming stability. This trend can be seen in other ethnic groups as well. Native-born farmers tend to be more heavily scattered from their original location than immigrant farmers.[155] It is the idea of self-dependence and the respect that comes with land ownership that has drawn immigrants to agriculture.

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[152] Lynch, 9.
[153] Ibid., 9.
[154] Josef J. Barton, "Land, Labor, and Community in Nueces: Czech Farmers and Mexican Laborers in South Texas, 1880-1930," in *Ethnicity on the Great Plains*, ed. Frederick C. Luebke (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 197.
[155] Brunner, 11.

When it came to the assessment of farming assimilation of Czech immigrants and their descendents, I chose to look at historical plat maps of four different precincts from two different Nebraska counties: Wilber and Big Blue precincts from Saline County and Bohemia and Sparta precincts from Knox County. These counties and precincts were selected based on their historically large Czech population. The plat maps used in this thesis are located at the Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln, Nebraska. The time periods chosen are the beginning of the twentieth century, post-World War I, and the 1960's and 70's. These period choices were determined based on the plat maps available at the historical society. Despite the irregular sample, this sixty to seventy year period helps provide a greater understanding of how land ownership has changed over time and how these patterns reflect the historical developments. While analyzing these plat maps, land that was either owned or rented by a person of Czech ancestry is colored red.

The first thing that can be seen is the large amount of clustering (Czech land ownership is shown in red) within the early years of the twentieth century, especially in the Big Blue and Sparta precincts. Czechs were very much a clustering group of people who found the creation of ethnic communities to provide emotional and physical support. In the early years of Czech settlements, these communities prevented the feeling of isolation and later grew to provide social networks.

From the beginning of the twentieth century and into the 1920's, an increase in Czech land ownership can be seen in every precinct shown. This could have been caused by second and third generation Czechs taking over family land. Further research on this topic could be conducted to determine what amount of land has been passed down through a family and/or

divided among children. It would also be an interesting point to address the changing amount of land owned by women either through inheritance or purchase.

Following the 1920's, only a marginal decrease in Czech land ownership is seen in the precincts selected. There are many possible reasons for this decrease. One possible explanation for this is the out migration to bigger cities such as Omaha. Omaha provided both more steady jobs and an established Czech community. This time period also follows the end of World War II. During this time, families were recovering from the war. Some soldiers were coming back from abroad while others were not. But, despite the pull of larger cities and the effects of the war, the Czech population in these precincts remained relatively consistent. Out of all the precincts shown, there is one precinct, Wilber Precinct in Saline County, that actually appears to be relatively untouched by the hands of time and there has been an increase in Czech land ownership over the years. This is no surprise as Wilber houses one of the most well-known Czech communities in the country and has provided a Czech community where Czech-Americans can celebrate their Czech heritage while generally still being able to live assimilated lives.

Like many other immigrant groups who had settled on the Great Plains, the Czechs were able to use their knowledge of farming to help create a sustainable life for themselves and their families. The new knowledge they gained was passed down younger generations of Czech-Americans. This commitment to the farming lifestyle is seen even in the mid to late twentieth century as Czechs continued to maintain their land ownership within the precincts. It is through practices like these that the Czechs and other ethnic groups were able to become the backbone of the Nebraska plains and influence farming for years to come.

1900

PLAT OF

BIG BLUE

Scale 2 Inches to the Mile Township 7 North Range 4 East. of the 6th Principal Meridian

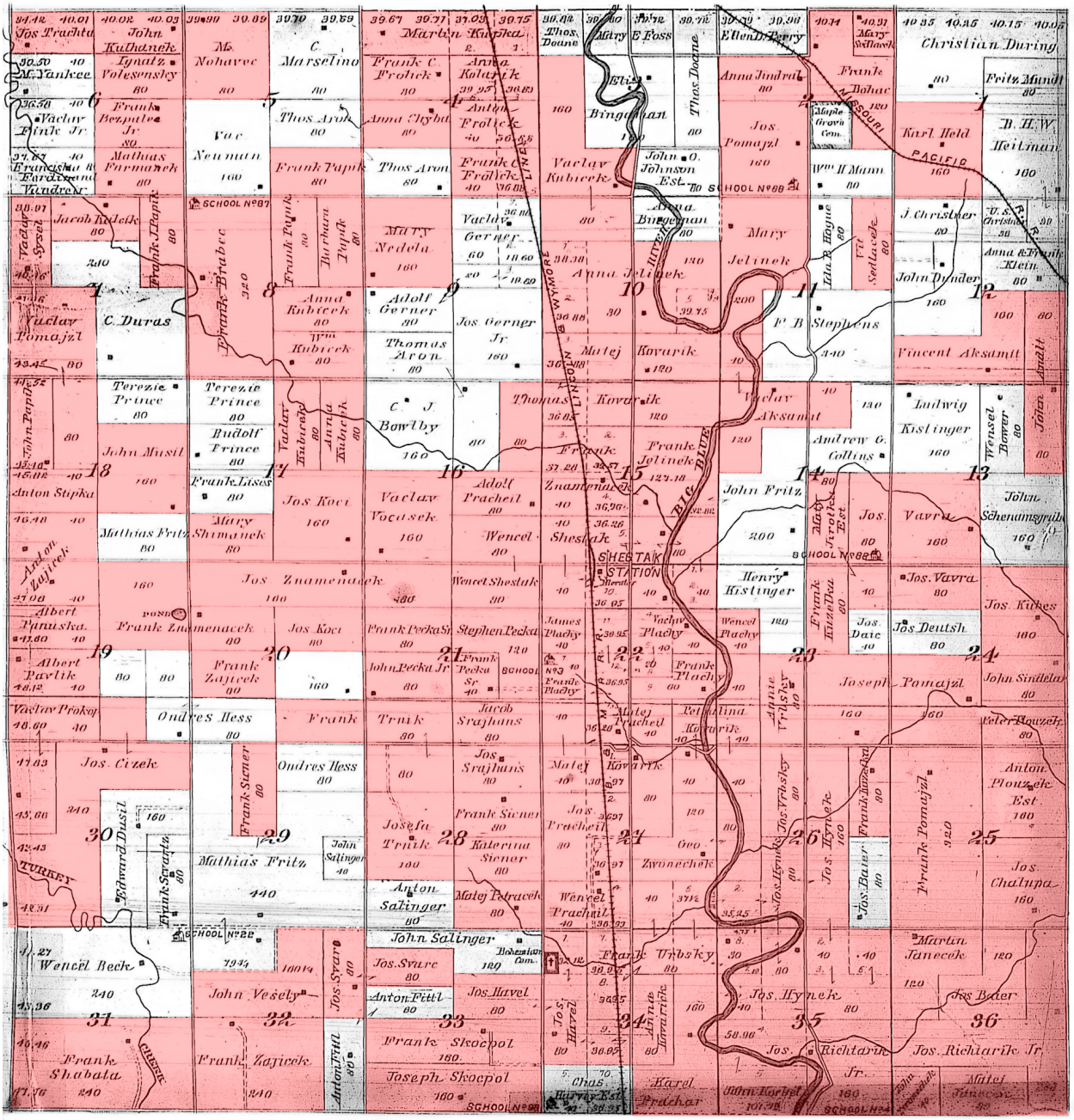
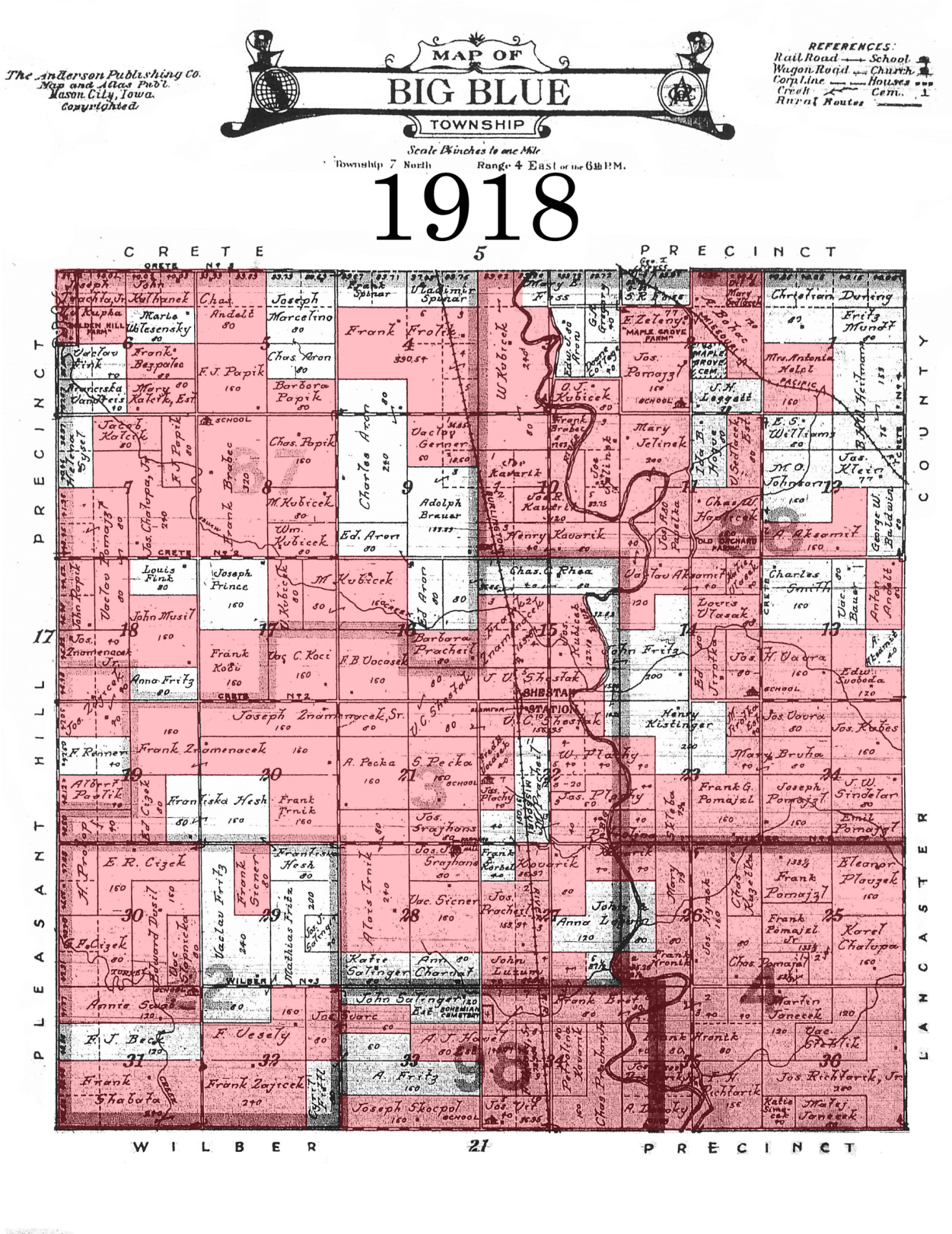


Figure 3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TOWNSHIP
Scale 1 Inches to one Mile
Township 7 North Range 4 East of the 6th P.M.
1918
REFERENCES:
Rail Road
Wagon Road
Corp. line
Creek
Rural Routes
School
Church
Houses
Cem.
CRETE PRECINCT
PLEASANT HILL PRECINCT
LANCASTER COUNTY
WILBER PRECINCT
5
21

Figure 4

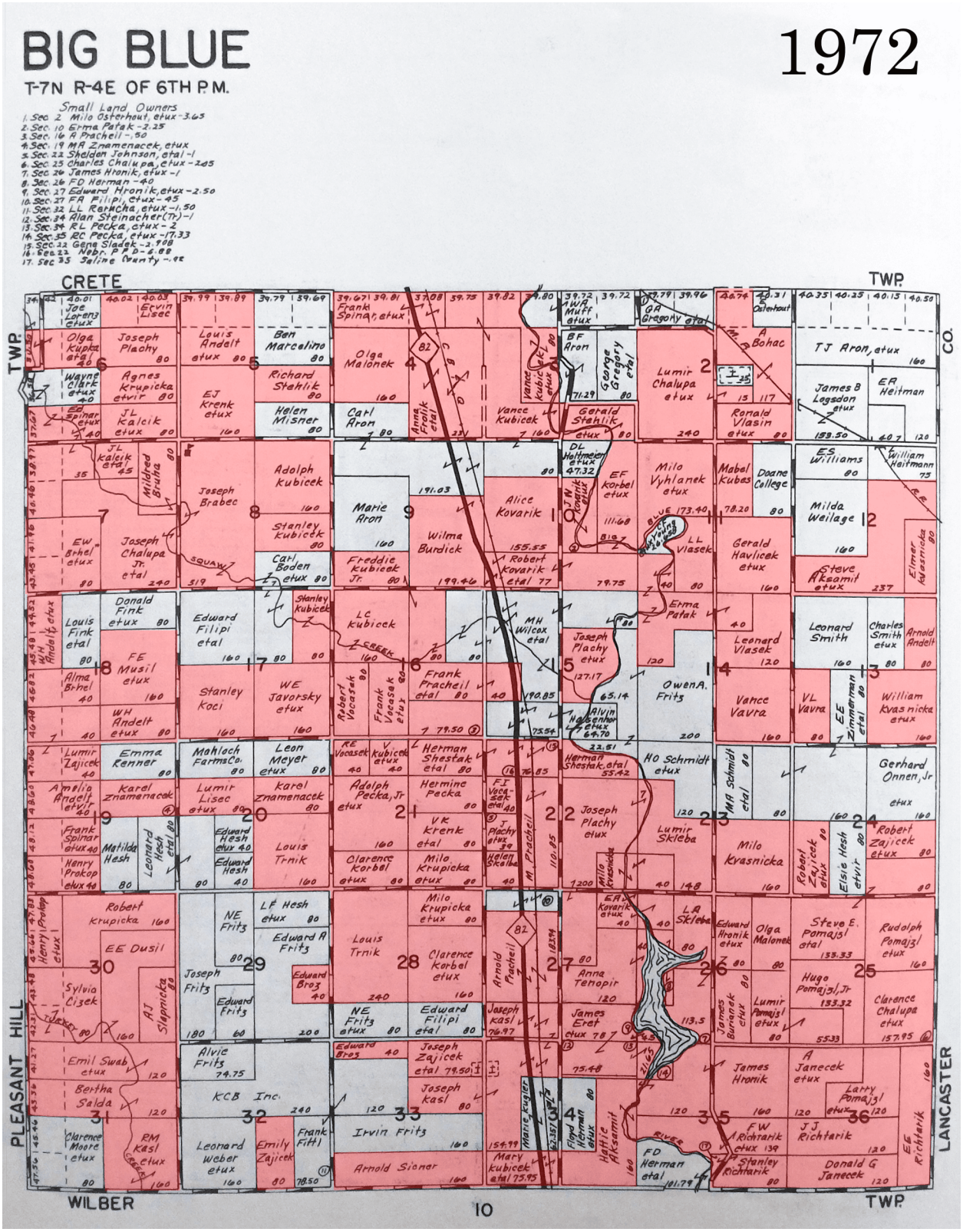

BIG BLUE
1972
T-7N R-4E OF 6TH P.M.
Small Land Owners
1. Sec. 2 Milo Osterhout, etux - 3.63
2. Sec. 10 Erma Patak - 2.25
3. Sec. 16 A Prachell - .50
4. Sec. 19 MA Znamenacek, etux
5. Sec. 22 Sheldon Johnson, etal - /
6. Sec. 25 Charles Chalupa, etux - 2.05
7. Sec. 26 James Hronik, etux - /
8. Sec. 26 FD Herman - 4.0
9. Sec. 27 Edward Hronik, etux - 2.50
10. Sec. 27 FA Filipi, etux - 4.5
11. Sec. 32 LL Rathcha, etux - 1.50
12. Sec. 34 Alan Steinacher (Tr.) - /
13. Sec. 34 RL Pecka, etux - 2
14. Sec. 35 RC Pecka, etux - 17.33
15. Sec. 22 Gene Sladek - 2.908
16. Sec. 23 Nebr. P P D - 6.08
17. Sec. 35 Saline County - .48
CRETE
TWP.
TWP.
CO.
PLEASANT HILL
LANCASTER
WILBER
TWP.
10
Joe Lorenz etux
Ecvin Lisec
Olga Kupka etal
Joseph Plachy
Louis Andelt etux
Ben Marcelino
Olga Malonek
Vance Kubicek
BF Aron
George Gregory etal
Lumir Chalupa etux
A Bohac
TJ Aron, etux
James B Legsdon etux
ER Heitman
Wayne Clark etux
Agnes Krupicka etvir
EJ Krenk etux
Richard Stahlik
Carl Aron
Anna Kolnik etal
Gerald Stahlik etux
Ronald Vlasin
JL Kalcik etux
Helen Misner
Mildred Bruha
Joseph Brabec
Adolph Kubicek
Stanley Kubicek
Marie Aron
Alice Kovarik
DL Holtmeier etux
EF Korbel etux
Milo Vyhlanek etux
Mabel Kubes
Doane College
ES Williams
William Haltmann
Milda Weilage
Carl Boden etux
Wilma Burdick
Freddie Kubicek Jr.
Robert Kovarik etal
LL Vlasek
Gerald Havlicek etux
Steve Aksamit etux
Elmer Kvasnicka
EW Brhel etux
Joseph Chalupa Jr. etal
Donald Fink etux
Louis Fink etal
Edward Filipi etal
Stanley Koci
WE Javorsky etux
LC Kubicek
MH Wilcox etal
Joseph Plachy etux
Owen A. Fritz
Vance Vavra
Leonard Smith
Charles Smith etux
Arnold Andelt
VL Vavra
EE Zimmerman etal
William Kvasnicka etux
Alma Brhel
FE Musil etux
WH Andelt etux
Frank Vacasek etux
Frank Prachell etal
Alvin Halsenhorn etux
Emma Renner
Leon Meyer
Herman Shestak etal
HO Schmidt etux
Gerhard Onnen, Jr etux
Lumir Zajicek
Mahloch Farms Co.
Lumir Lisec etux
Karel Znamenacek
Adolph Pecka, Jr etux
Hermine Pecka
VK Krenk etal
Milo Krupicka etux
Joseph Plachy etux
Lumir Skleba
MA Schmidt etal
Milo Kvasnicka
Robert Zajicek etux
Elsie Hesh etvir
Amelia Andelt etvir
Frank Spinar etux
Henry Prokop etux
Matilda Hesh
Leonard Hesh etal
Louis Trnik
Clarence Korbel etux
Edward Hesh etux
Robert Krupicka
EE Dusil
Sylvia Cizek
AJ Slepnicka
NE Fritz
LF Hesh etux
Edward A Fritz
Edward Broz
Joseph Fritz
Edward Fritz
Louis Trnik
Milo Krupicka etux
Clarence Korbel etux
NE Fritz etux
Edward Filipi etal
Arnold Prachell
Joseph Kasl
James Eret etux
Anna Tenopir
EA Kovarik etux
LA Skleba
Edward Hronik etux
Olga Malonek
Steve E. Pomajzl etal
Rudolph Pomajzl etux
Hugo Pomajzl, Jr.
Clarence Chalupa etux
James Burianek etux
Lumir Pomajzl etux
Emil Swab etux
Bertha Salda etux
Clarence Moore etux
RM Kasl etux
Alvie Fritz
KCB Inc.
Leonard Weber etux
Emily Zajicek
Frank Fitl
Edward Broz
Joseph Zajicek etal
Joseph Kasl
Irvin Fritz
Arnold Sisner
Marie Kugler
Floyd Herman etux
Hattie Aksamit
James Hronik
A Janecek etux
Larry Pomajzl etux
JJ Richtarik
FW Richtarik etux
Stanley Richtarik
FD Herman etal
Donald G Janecek
EF Richtarik

Figure 5

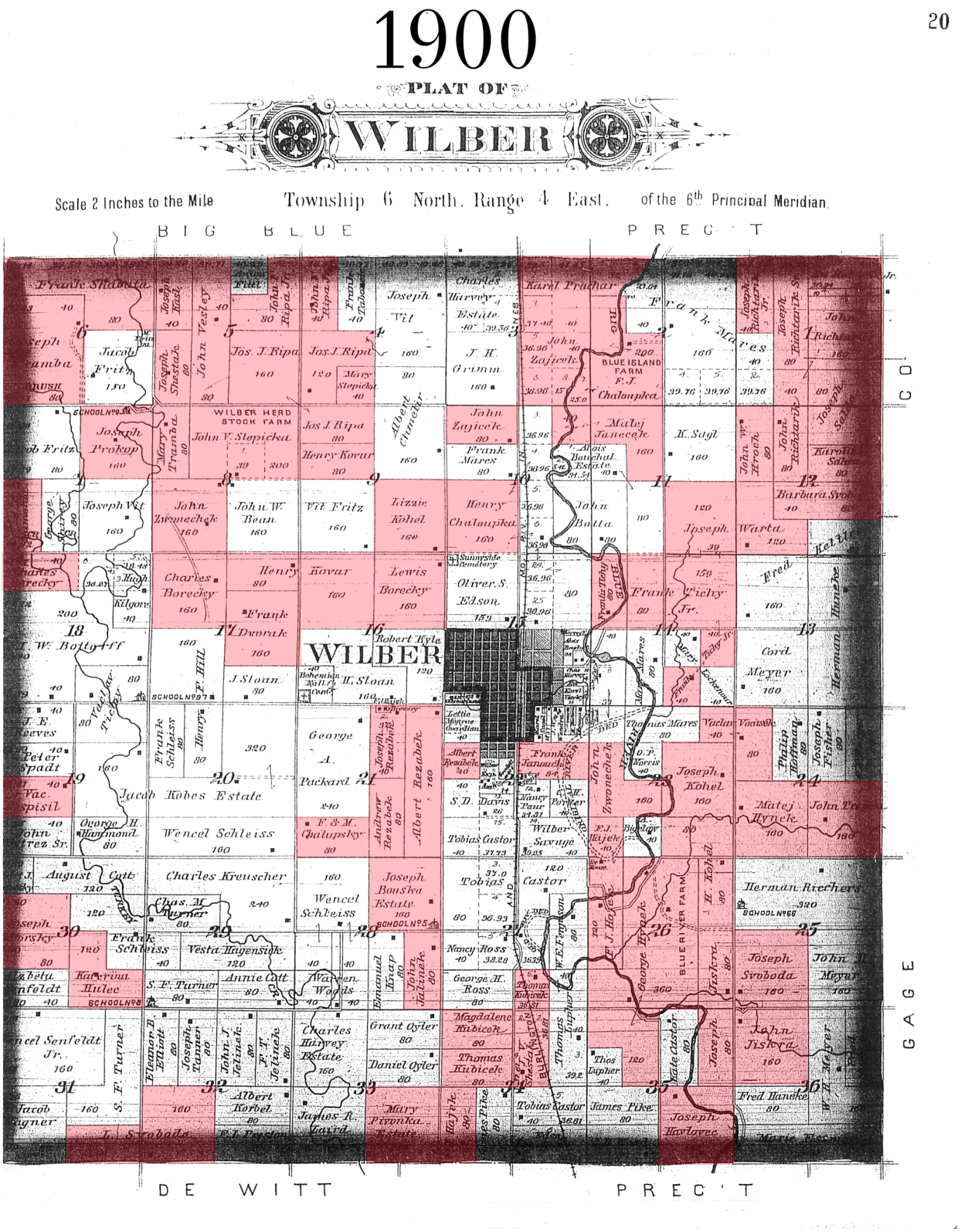
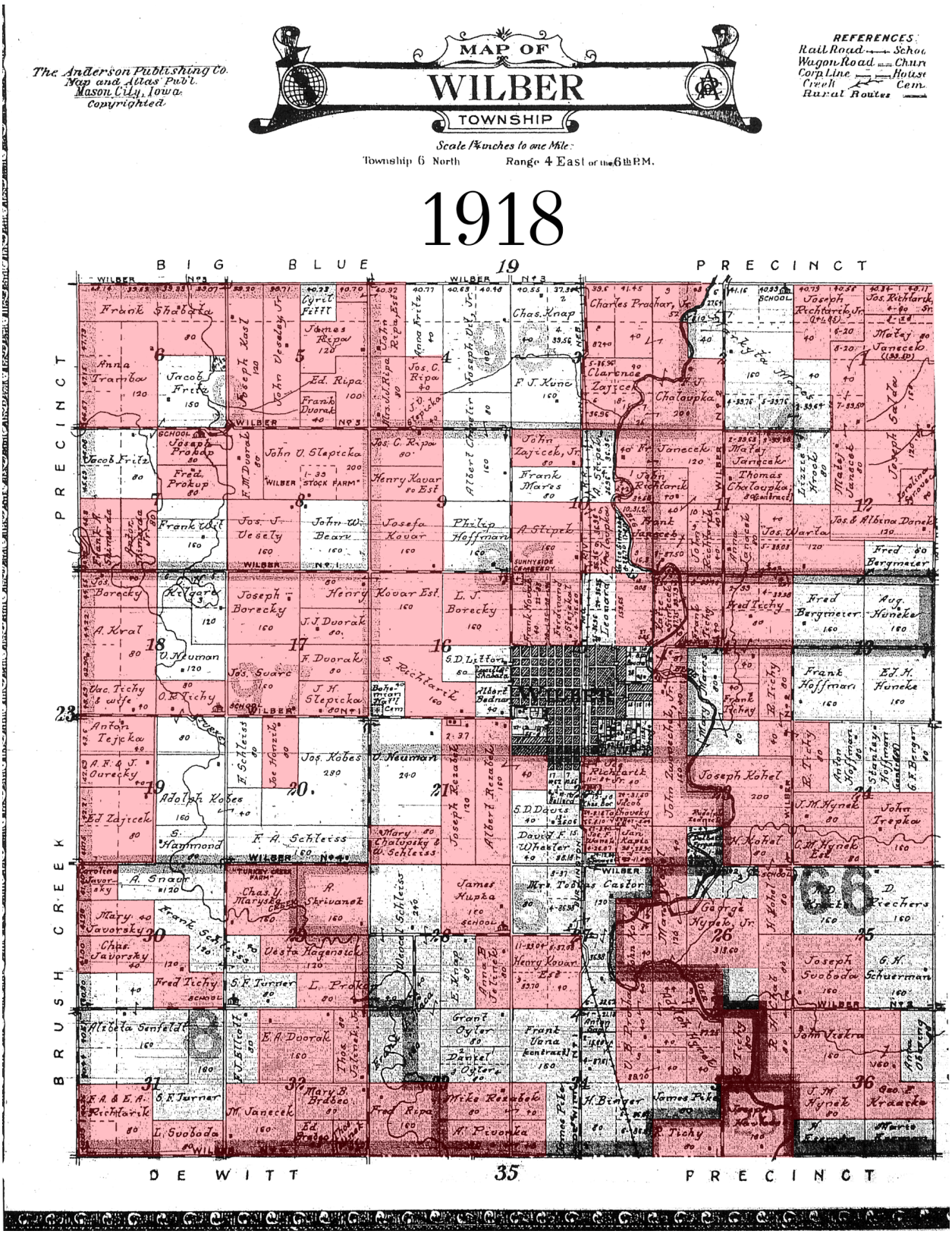

1900
PLAT OF
WILBER
Scale 2 Inches to the Mile
Township 6 North. Range 4 East. of the 6th Principal Meridian.
BIG BLUE PREC'T
DE WITT PREC'T
WILBER
BLUE ISLAND FARM
BLUE RIVER FARM
WILBER HERD STOCK FARM
GAGE CO.

Figure 6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Map and Atlas Pub'l.
Mason City, Iowa.
Copyrighted.
MAP OF
WILBER
TOWNSHIP
Scale 1¼ inches to one Mile.
Township 6 North
Range 4 East of the 6th P.M.
REFERENCES.
Rail Road
Wagon Road
Corp. Line
Civil
Rural Routes
1918
BIG BLUE PRECINCT
PRECINCT
BRUSH CREEK
DE WITT
35
PRECINCT
WILBER
WILBER STOCK FARM
SCHOOL
CEMETERY

Figure 7

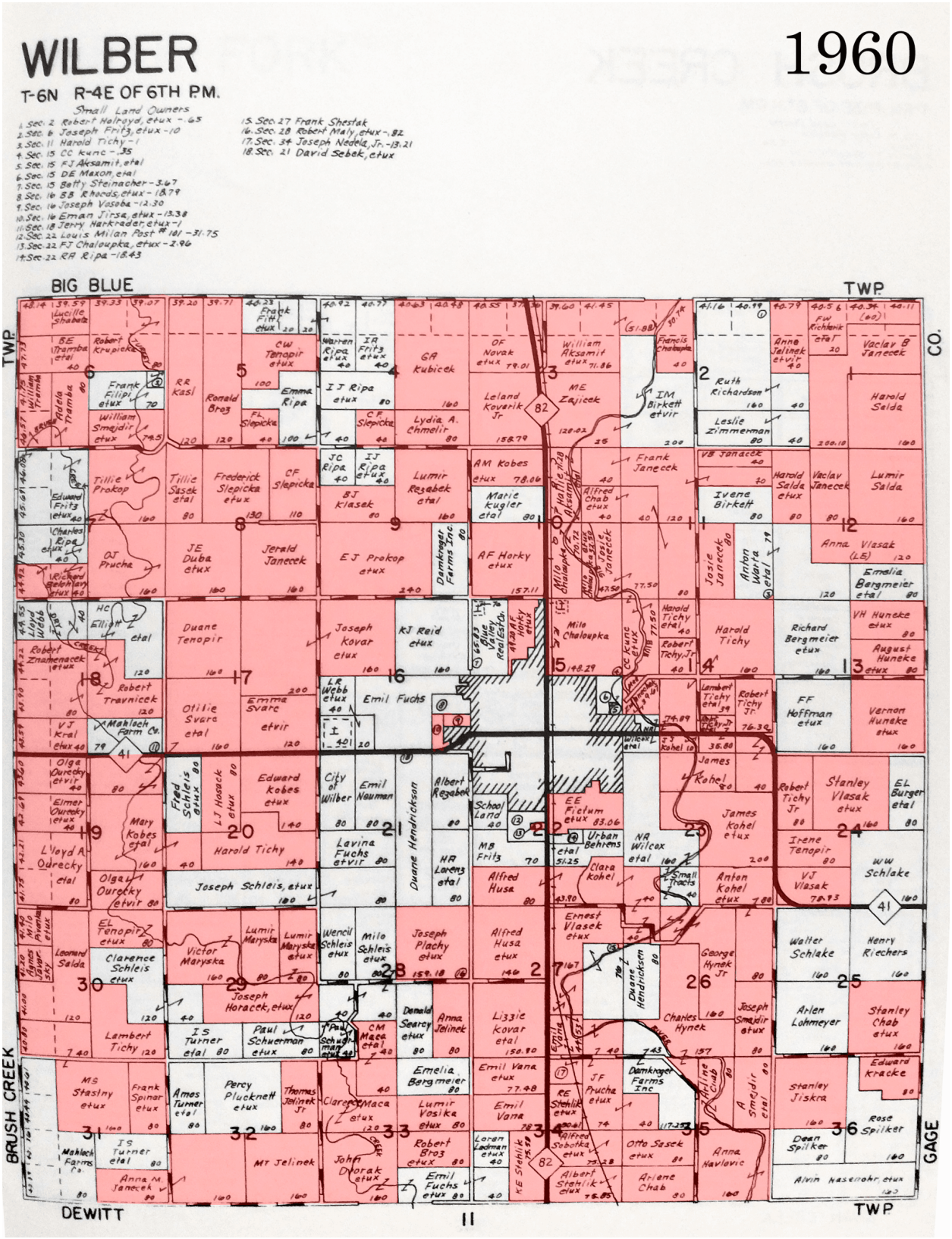
WILBER
1960
T-6N R-4E OF 6TH P.M.
Small Land Owners
1. Sec. 2 Robert Holroyd, etux - 6.5
2. Sec. 6 Joseph Fritz, etux - 10
3. Sec. 11 Harold Tichy - 1
4. Sec. 15 CC Kunc - 35
5. Sec. 15 F.J. Aksamit, etal
6. Sec. 15 D.E. Maxon, etal
7. Sec. 15 Betty Steinacher - 3.67
8. Sec. 16 S.S. Rhoads, etux - 18.79
9. Sec. 16 Joseph Vasoba - 12.30
10. Sec. 16 Erman Jirsa, etux - 13.38
11. Sec. 18 Jerry Harkrader, etux - 1
12. Sec. 22 Louis Milan Post # 101 - 31.75
13. Sec. 22 F.J. Chaloupka, etux - 2.96
14. Sec. 22 R.A. Ripa - 18.43
15. Sec. 27 Frank Shestak
16. Sec. 28 Robert Maly, etux - 82
17. Sec. 34 Joseph Nedela, Jr. - 13.21
18. Sec. 21 David Sebek, etux
BIG BLUE TWP.
BRUSH CREEK
GAGE CO.
DEWITT
TWP.
11

Figure 8

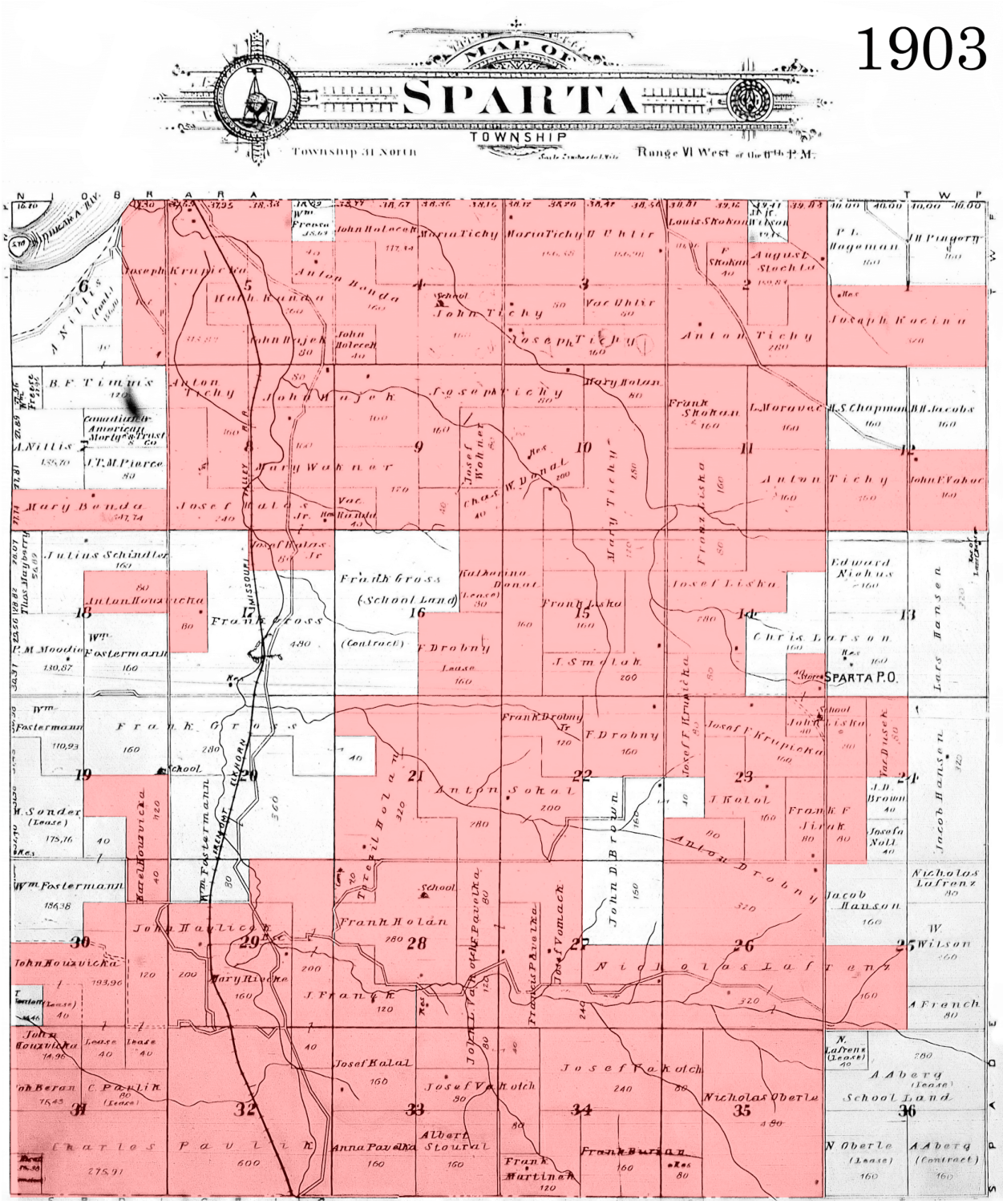
1903
MAP OF
SPARTA
TOWNSHIP
Township 31 North
Range VI West of the 6th P.M.
SPARTA P.O.

Figure 9

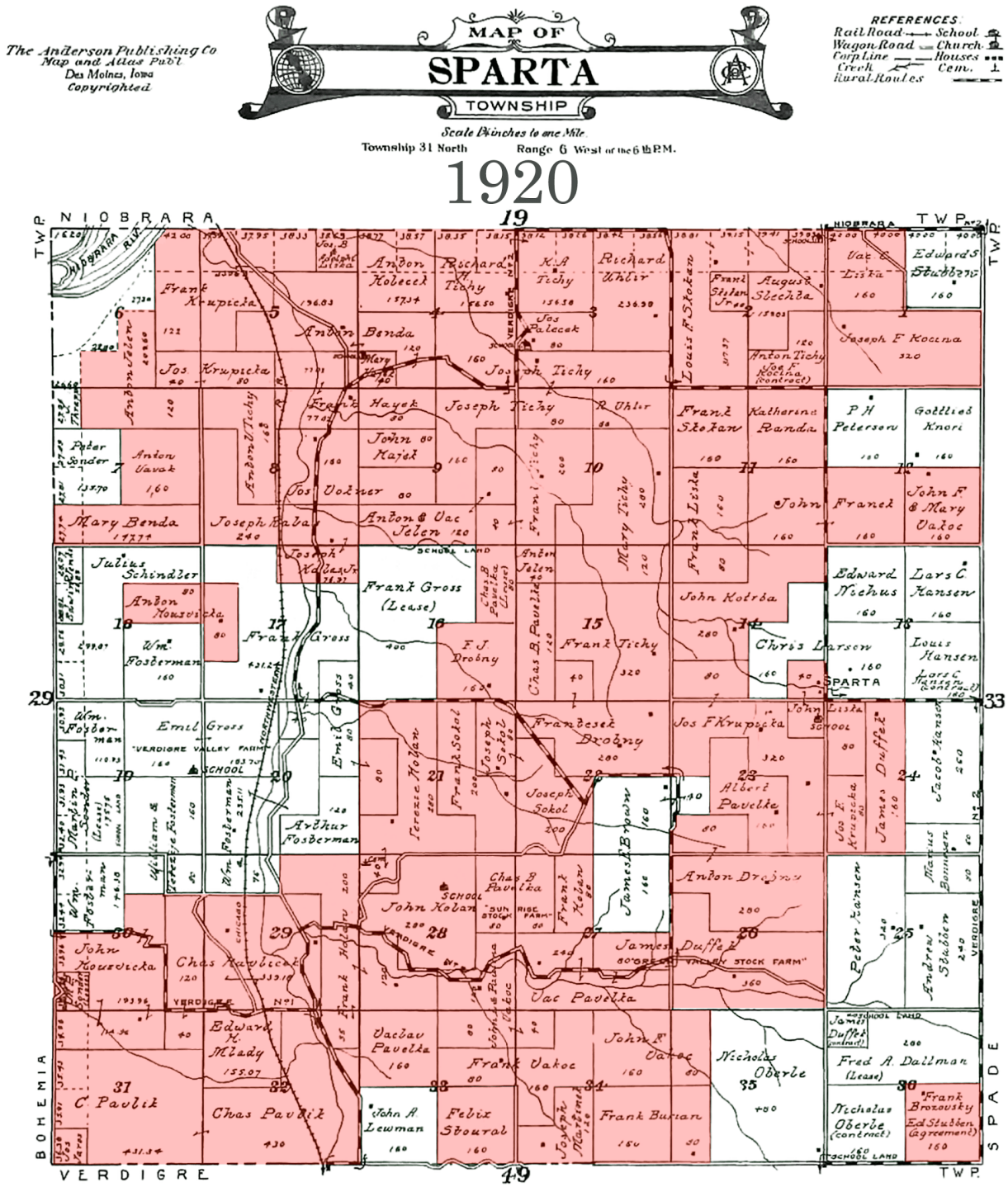
The Anderson Publishing Co
Map and Atlas Publ.
Des Moines, Iowa
Copyrighted
MAP OF
SPARTA
TOWNSHIP
Scale 2 inches to one Mile.
Township 31 North Range 6 West of the 6th P.M.
1920
REFERENCES:
Rail Road
Wagon Road
Corp. Line
Creek
Rural Routes
School
Church
Houses
Cem.
NIOBRARA TWP.
VERDIGRE TWP.
BOHEMIA
SPADE
SPARTA
SCHOOL LAND

Figure 10

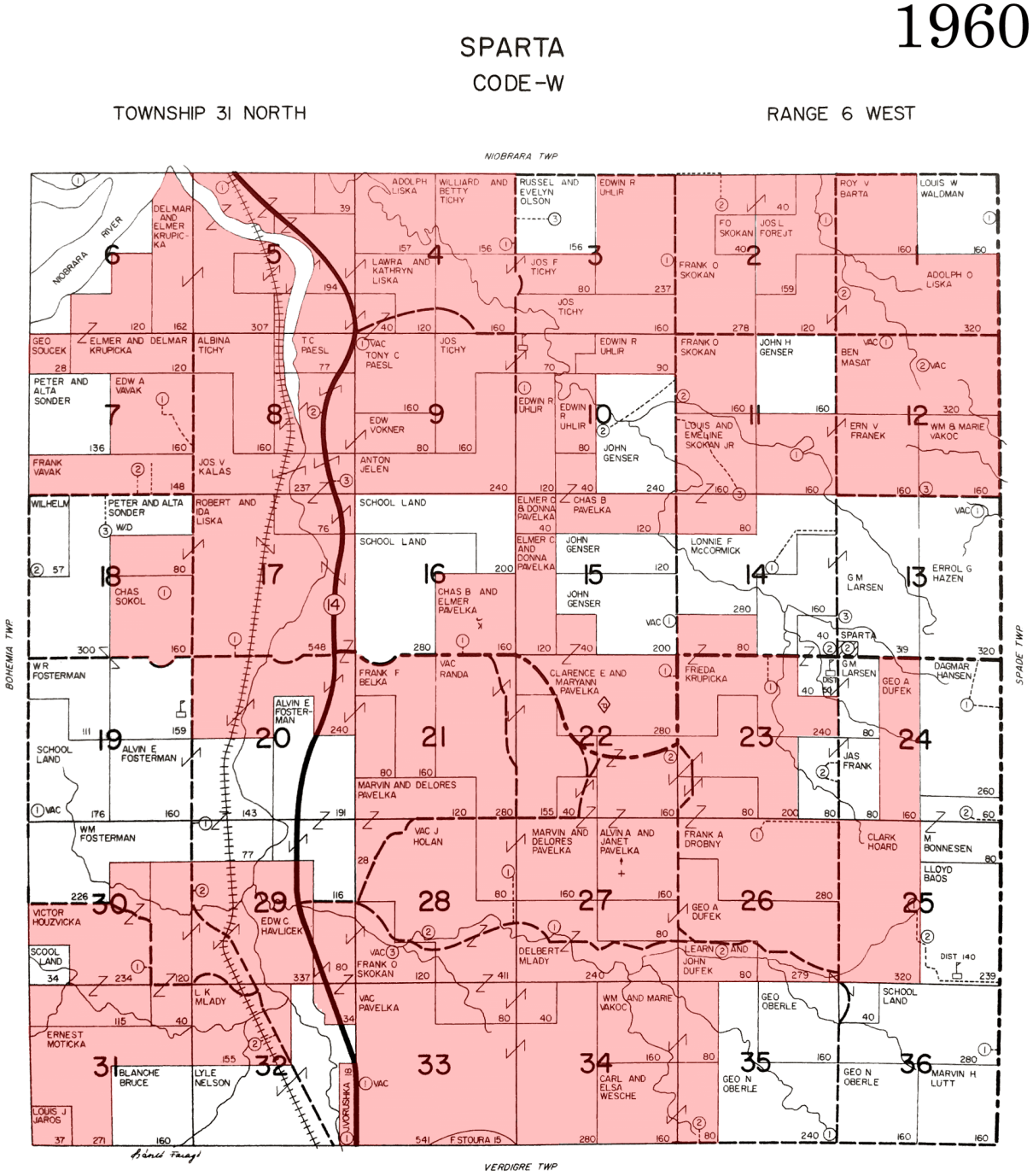
1960
SPARTA
CODE-W
TOWNSHIP 31 NORTH
RANGE 6 WEST
NIOBRARA TWP
BOHEMIA TWP
SPADE TWP
VERDIGRE TWP
NIOBRARA RIVER
DELMAR AND ELMER KRUPICKA
ADOLPH LISKA
WILLIARD AND BETTY TICHY
RUSSEL AND EVELYN OLSON
EDWIN R UHLIR
FO SKOKAN
JOS L FOREJT
ROY V BARTA
LOUIS W WALDMAN
LAWRA AND KATHRYN LISKA
JOS F TICHY
FRANK O SKOKAN
ADOLPH O LISKA
JOS TICHY
GEO SOUCEK
ELMER AND DELMAR KRUPICKA
ALBINA TICHY
T C PAESL
VAC TONY C PAESL
JOS TICHY
JOHN H GENSER
BEN MASAT
PETER AND ALTA SONDER
EDW A VAVAK
EDW VOKNER
LOUIS AND EMELINE SKOKAN JR
ERN V FRANEK
WM & MARIE VAKOC
FRANK VAVAK
JOS V KALAS
ANTON JELEN
JOHN GENSER
WILHELM
W/D
ROBERT AND IDA LISKA
SCHOOL LAND
ELMER C & DONNA PAVELKA
CHAS B PAVELKA
LONNIE F McCORMICK
CHAS SOKOL
CHAS B AND ELMER PAVELKA
JOHN GENSER
G M LARSEN
ERROL G HAZEN
SPARTA
W R FOSTERMAN
ALVIN E FOSTERMAN
FRANK F BELKA
VAC RANDA
CLARENCE E AND MARYANN PAVELKA
FRIEDA KRUPICKA
DAGMAR HANSEN
GEO A DUFEK
JAS FRANK
MARVIN AND DELORES PAVELKA
VAC J HOLAN
ALVIN A AND JANET PAVELKA
FRANK A DROBNY
CLARK HOARD
M BONNESEN
LLOYD BAOS
WM FOSTERMAN
VICTOR HOUZVICKA
EDW C HAVLICEK
GEO A DUFEK
DELBERT MLADY
LEARN AND JOHN DUFEK
DIST 140
SCOOL LAND
L K MLADY
VAC FRANK O SKOKAN
VAC PAVELKA
WM AND MARIE VAKOC
GEO OBERLE
SCHOOL LAND
ERNEST MOTICKA
BLANCHE BRUCE
LYLE NELSON
LVORLISHKA
VAC
CARL AND ELSA WESCHE
GEO N OBERLE
GEO N OBERLE
MARVIN H LUTT
LOUIS J JAROS
F STOURA
Bondi Farag

Figure 11

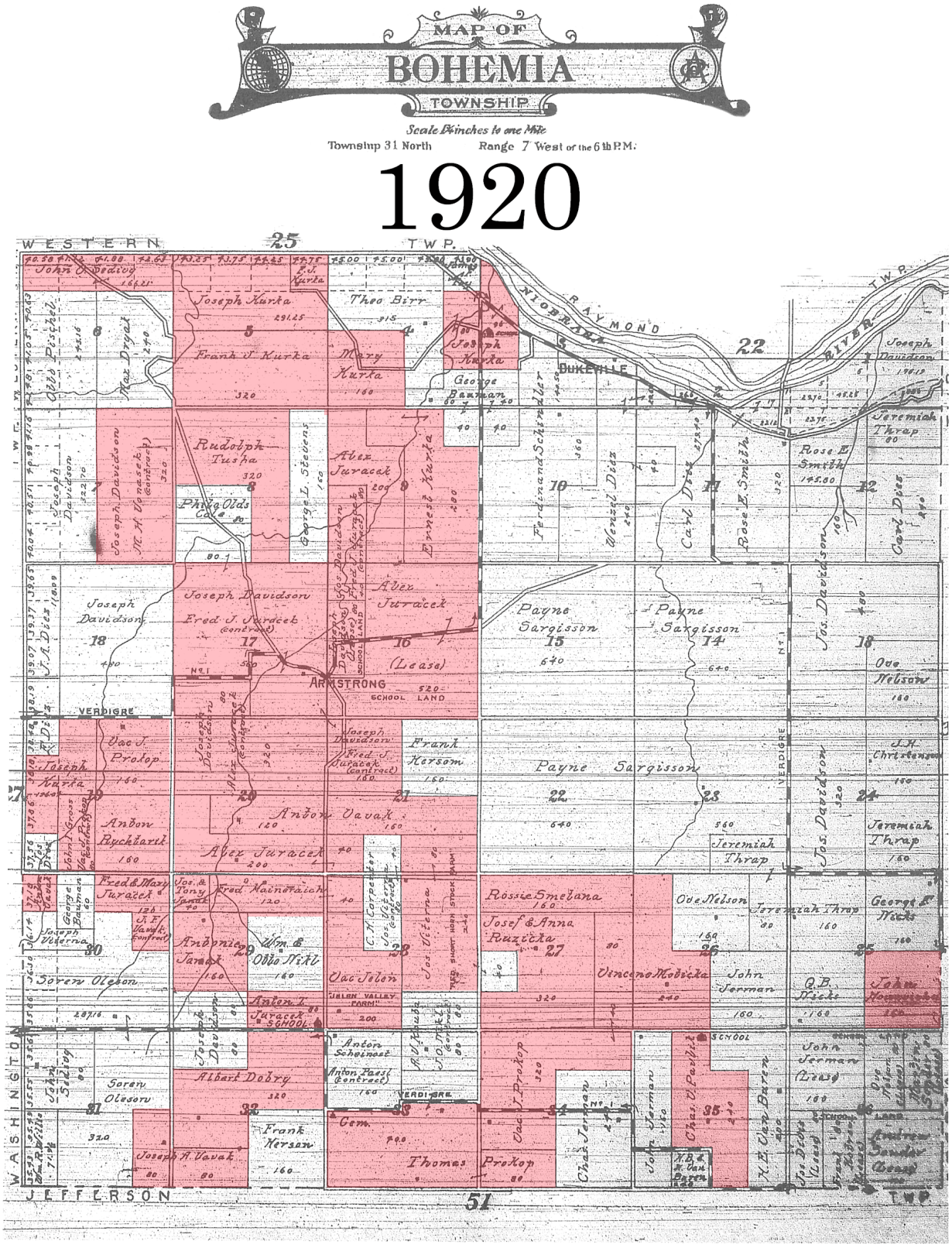
MAP OF
BOHEMIA
TOWNSHIP
Scale 4 inches to one Mile
Township 31 North Range 7 West of the 6th P.M.
1920
WESTERN
25
T W P.
NIOBRARA
RAYMOND
DUKEVILLE
ARMSTRONG
SCHOOL LAND
VERDIGRE
WASHINGTON
JEFFERSON
51
Joseph Kurka
Frank J. Kurka
Theo Birr
Mary Kurka
George Bauman
Rudolph Tusha
Alex Juracek
Ernest Kurka
Joseph Davidson
Fred J. Juracek (contract)
Payne Sargisson
Ferdinand Schmaltzer
Wenzel Diss
Carl Diss
Rose E. Smith
Jos. Davidson
Jeremiah Thrap
Ode Nelson
Frank Kersom
Anton Vavak
Vac J. Prokop
Joseph Kurka
Anton Rychlarik
Fred & Mary Juracek
Jos. & Tony Janak
Fred Hanerlaich
Antonia Janak
Wm. & Otto Nill
Soren Olson
Albert Dobry
Frank Kersan
Joseph A. Vavak
Rossie Smetana
Josef & Anna Ruzicka
Vincenc Mobicka
John Jerman
Q.B. Nicks
Vac Jelen
Jos. Verterna
Anton Scheinost
Anton Pazdi (contract)
Thomas Prokop
Chas. Jerman
Chas. V. Paul
Cem.
SCHOOL

Figure 12

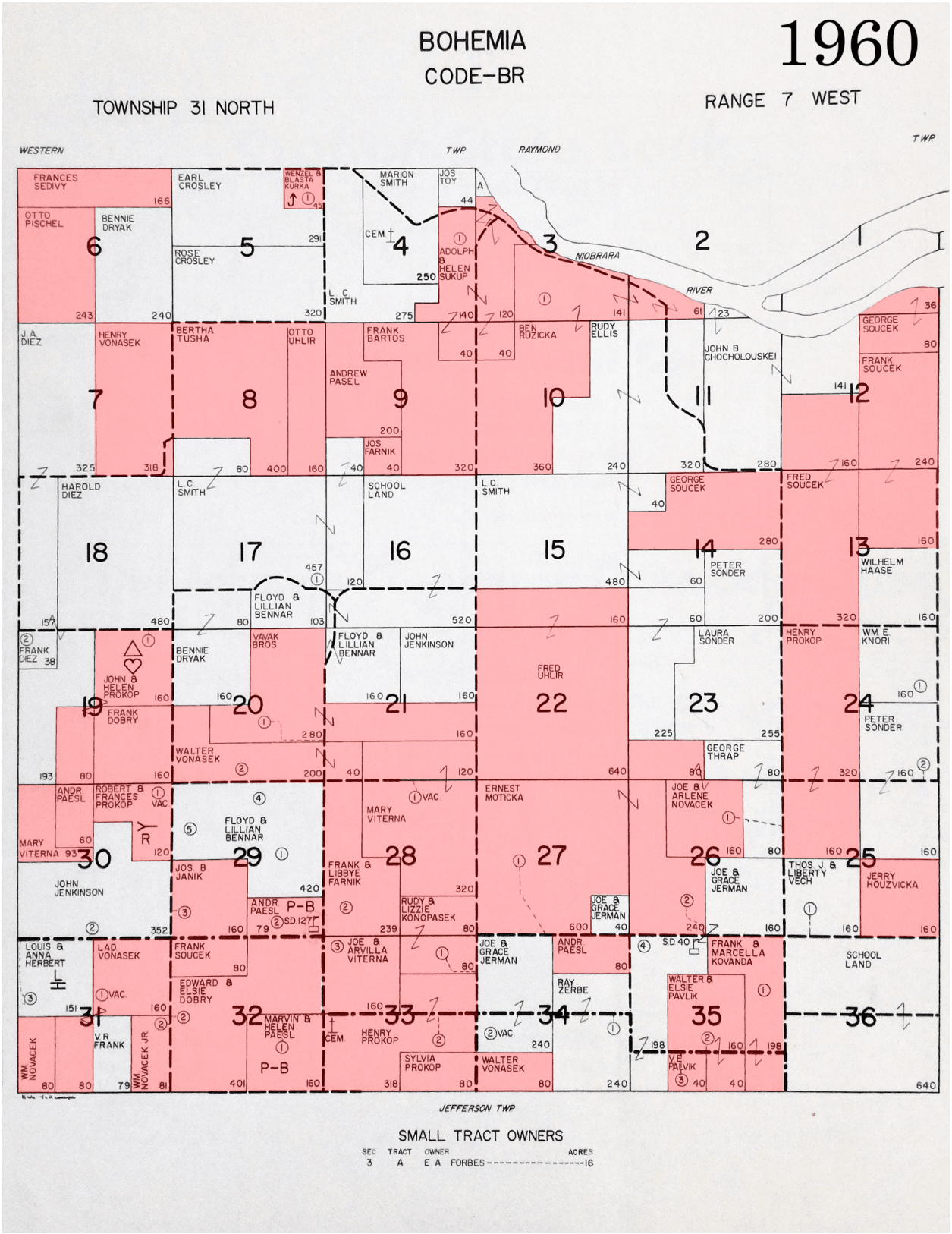
BOHEMIA
CODE-BR
1960
TOWNSHIP 31 NORTH
RANGE 7 WEST
WESTERN
TWP.
RAYMOND
TWP.
NIOBRARA
RIVER
JEFFERSON TWP.
SMALL TRACT OWNERS
SEC TRACT OWNER ACRES
3 A E A FORBES----------16

Figure 13

Intermarriage

The last factor of assimilation is that of intermarriage. Intermarriage applies to any married persons whose religious, racial or ethnic background is or was different from each other's (either prior to or after marriage).[156] In the case of interethnic marriages, it refers to a marriage between two people who were reared in two different cultural and national environments. Sociologists have broken marriage into two different types: in-choice and out-choice (inter-choice). In-choice refers to marrying someone of your same race or an American-born child of an immigrant.[157] Its counterpart is that of out-choice (inter-choice) in which a person marries someone who is of a different ethnic or racial background than themselves.

As more and more people engage in interethnic marriage, ethnicity has become less powerful than it has been in the past. Because of this, intermarriage is an important factor in assimilation. Milton Gordon, an American sociologist, explained that for an ethnic group to fully assimilate, exogamy (marrying outside the community) has to be prevalent.[158] By doing so, immigrants are able to go from being an ethnic group to being an "American", thus decreasing the distance between two ethnic groups. But while intermarriage is an important factor in assimilation, it is not the definitive test of assimilation and Americanization. In most cases, intermarriage just hastens the process of racial and cultural assimilation.[159]

Over the years, intermarriage patterns have developed. Sons of immigrants are more than twice as likely to marry a daughter of American-born parents and are less likely to marry foreign-stock brides.[160] Two-thirds of foreign-born brides and one half of their daughters are

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[156] Albert I. Gordon, *Intermarriage: Interfaith, Interracial, Interethnic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 1.
[157] Brunner, 76.
[158] Screws, *Retaining Their Culture*, 177.
[159] Brunner, 75.
[160] Ibid., 76.

likely to marry someone of their own racial group, compared to three-fifths of foreign-born and one half of foreign-stock grooms. These numbers tend to increase in rural areas.

There are many different factors that affect rates in which individuals intermarry. These factors tend to fit into the categories of cultural, environmental, physical, and psychological. Family is a social factor that can help, hinder, or change the way in which a person lives their life. It is an important factor that can help determine the values of an individual.[161] In the past, and even today, family helps to provide a sense of community and hold people in their place. In earlier generations, the goals of a person were often determined by their parents while today a person's goals are often determined by their peers.[162] These social and parental controls had less of an effect on people following World War II.

Rates of intermarriage are also affected by how connected a person is with their group. If a person feels no sense of identification with a religious group, ethnic group, or their family then they are less likely to feel the need to marry someone of the same group. In this case, intermarriage is seen as a way to break away from a person's identity and past.

One last factor is that of media and popular culture. Over the years, literature, movies, television, and theater have romanticized marriage.[163] These forms of media place emphasis on physical attractiveness and feelings rather than that of family background and educational standards. The rise in the belief of human equality can also be seen as a factor.

For the most part, Czechs practiced endogamy during the nineteenth century. Between the years of 1880 and 1910, the Czechs of Saunders County, Nebraska married other Czechs 96 percent of the time.[164] When a Czech did not marry another Czech, they were most likely to

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[161] Gordon, *Intermarriage*, 39.
[162] Ibid., 39.
[163] Ibid., 44.
[164] Screws, *Retaining*, 177.

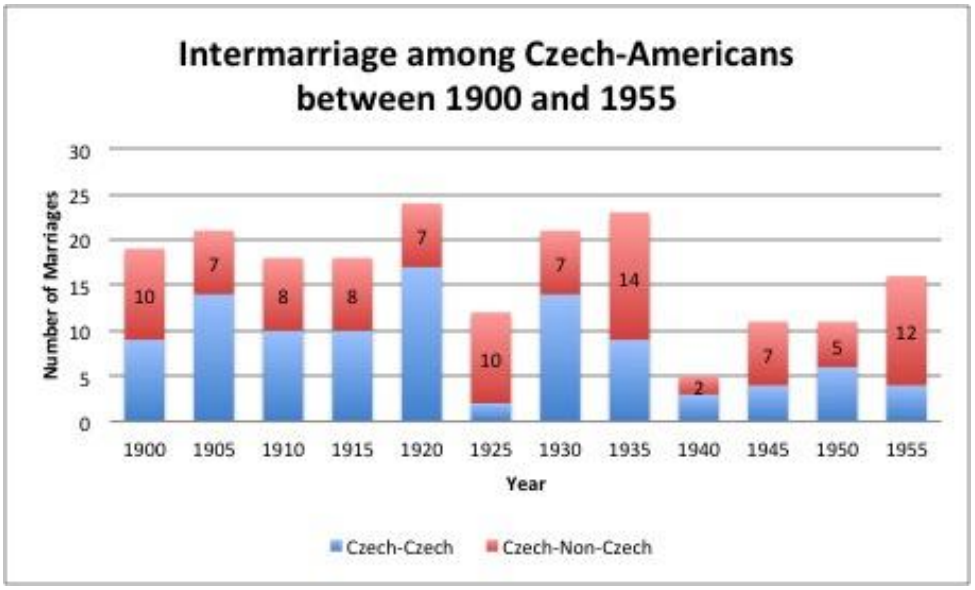

Figure 14 shows data collected from the local Wilber, Nebraska newspaper on endogamous and exogamous marriages of local Czechs.

marry a German, Austrian, or Hungarian. Germans were a popular choice because the language barrier was not as great and most Czechs were at least somewhat familiar with German.[165]

By the end of World War I, intermarriage had become increasingly popular with most Czech families being related to multiple non-Czechs. Once again, mid-European races tended to be the popular choice among Czechs. But the deciding factor was still the ability to speak the language of the other race.[166] These trends in intermarriage brought with them changes in social networks which were seen as closed communities expanded beyond their original Czech identity.[167] But even as intermarriage became the norm, many rural areas still maintained their Czech population.

[165] Miller, 76.
[166] Thomas Čapek, "Sociological Factors in Czech Immigration," *The Slavonic and East European Review. American Series* 3, no. 4 (Dec., 1944), 96.
[167] Hannan, 40.

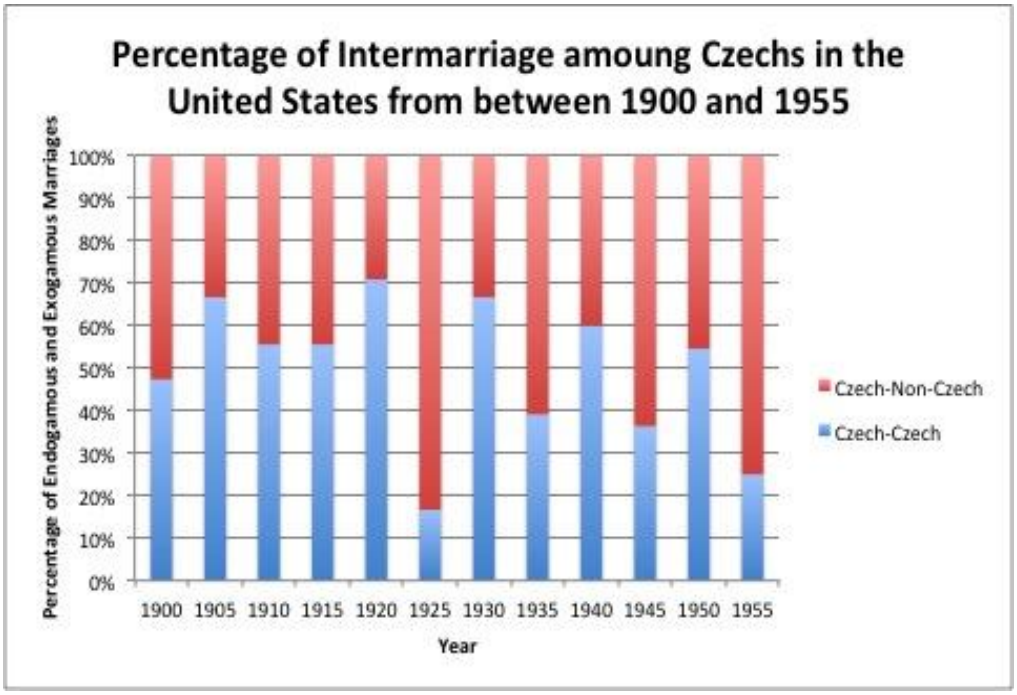

Figure 15 shows the percent of marriages each year that are endogamous and exogamous.

Figures 14 and 15 represent the number of endogamous and exogamous marriages among Czechs in the United States from 1900 to 1955. The data was collected from marriage announcements in the Wilber Democrat, a local newspaper from Wilber, Nebraska, every five years from April to August. I also pulled marriage records from a FamilySearch account that was set up by the Nebraska State Historical Society.

When it comes to intermarriage among Czechs it can be seen that there is no consistent pattern. The greatest amount of intermarriage can be seen in 1925 and 1955. These numbers are expected due to the historical events taking place at around these times. The 1920's were marked by the end of World War I along with the rise of anti-immigrant feelings. Many Czech immigrants fought for the United States in order to show their patriotism and loyalty to the country. Following the war, many young men were not fortunate enough to make it back home. The creation of the National Origins Act of 1924 and the anti-immigrant movement may have also caused Czechs to choose a partner that was American or of another ethnicity.

During and following World War II, a decrease in the number of marriages is seen. Like World War I, many young men were deployed overseas and only a portion of them ever returned home, which, in turn, affected the number of marriages following the war. Also, with the rise of Communism within Czechoslovakia, came a decrease to the number of migrants that were allowed to leave the country. This resulted in a decrease in the amount of new Czechs to the United States.

Czech Ethnicity and Culture Today

While Czech-Americans were affected by assimilation and Americanization, they fought hard to retain their heritage. Suzanne Sinke, a historian at Florida State University, discusses how groups that propose an alternative vision towards the linear progression of becoming "American", rather than being passive victims of the melting pot, are able to retain the cultural heritage more than other groups.[168] People within these groups tend to have different views. Some may see group heritage as one that is different than the mainstream and can be built on while others consider it to be short-lived and is constantly being reinvented. Today, original cultures that were brought with the immigrants are now only ancestral memories or traditions that are enjoyed at museums and festivals.[169]

To many of the younger generations, ethnic culture is seen as unuseful. These generations are effectively becoming non-ethnic primary groups. To retain at least some aspect of their heritage, some will look for easy ways to express their identity that do not conflict with their way

[168] Suzanne Sinke, "Tulips Are Blooming in Holland, Michigan: Analysis of a Dutch-American Festival," in *Immigration and Ethnicity: American Society- "Melting Pot" or "Salad Bowl"?*, ed. Michael D'Innocenzo and Josef P. Sirefman (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1992), 3.
[169] Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, no. 1 (Jan., 1979), 6.

of life.[170] These people tend to stay away from traditions that need to be practiced constantly or organizations that require active membership.

Efforts towards maintaining ethnic heritage can be translated into symbolic ethnicity. Symbolic ethnicity is described as a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated into everyday life.[171] This concept often occurs when interests in the old country are historical and thus symbolic ethnicity functions as an indicator of the persistence of ethnic groups and cultures. But it does it in a way that does not require ethnic members to join groups or networks and does not require a practiced culture.

Like many ethnic groups in the United States, Czech-Americans have fallen victim to assimilation and Americanization even after putting up a fight to maintain their heritage. Czech language maintenance has been an up and down roller coaster from the very beginning of Czech immigration. By the second half of the twentieth century, many Czech communities and institutions had put energy towards reviving the language. This was a rather hard task because most Czech-Americans had no contact with the motherland. The language was often associated with the elderly and was no longer used in oral communication.

The 1980's brought about a wave of language revival, especially among the elderly. Weekly classes were promoted, some of which were hosted by native Czech speakers, but participants normally expressed greater interest in talking about ethnic experiences or singing Czech songs then actually learning Czech. The first Czech language courses were taught at the University of Nebraska in 1959 by Vladimir Kucera. Kucera had traveled around Nebraska for thirty years offering Czech language classes. Eighteen years later, the university decided to offer

[170] Gans, 8.
[171] Ibid., 10.

the Czech courses only every other year due to the lack of funding.[172] As a result, many protested thus sparking a renewed interest in the Czech language. Czech courses were brought back in 1980 due to lobbying by Nebraska Czech organizations.

Throughout its existence, analysis has been conducted on the students who have taken the Czech courses provided by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. From 1991 to 1993, there had been thirty-six students who had enrolled in the Czech language program. On average, the students were fourth, fifth, and sixth generation Czechs and 11% were not Czech.[173] Students explained that most of the time only third generation Czechs knew how to speak Czech. Czech would occasionally be used when talking to relatives or friends but never to grandchildren. This was one of the reasons given for taking the Czech courses. Other reasons included working/studying in the Czech Republic or fulfilling a language requirement. By 1993, the university board of regents had decided to eliminate funding for the Czech language program and only offered Czech as an extension course.[174] Due to these changes, the number of students in the program gradually dropped. Despite this fact, there was a rise in membership of Komensky Clubs.

The first Komensky Club was founded in 1907 at the University of Nebraska by Jan Amos. Within the following eleven years, the number of Komensky Clubs across the country grew to twenty-nine.[175] The goal of these clubs was to spread Czech culture and news of Czech-Americans. They also collected money to help send Czechs to universities.

Czech ethnic organizations changed over the years. Many of the early Czech ethnic organizations had recognized Czech as the official language which can be contrasted to today's

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[172] Šašková-Pierce, 212.
[173] Ibid., 214.
[174] Ibid., 213.
[175] Ibid., 211.

Czech organizations that were established in the 1980's and currently only use English.[176] To many of the younger members, the use of Czech represented a hurdle and prevented people from joining the organization. This struggle made things difficult when describing Czech heritage. In the 1980's, there was an overwhelming lack of knowledge of the Czech language and Czech literature. In 1975, eight out of forty-two Western Fraternal Life Association lodges conducted their meetings in Czech.[177] By 1993, none of them did. The number of active Nebraska Sokol chapters also decreased as they struggled to retain members. These organizations were in constant competition with other not-so-traditional sports organizations.

Despite the decrease in Czech ethnic organizations and the use of the Czech language, Czechs have worked hard to preserve and celebrate their heritage. The idea of creating a Czech heritage festival was first proposed in 1962 during the Wilber, Nebraska city elections. The idea of a festival gained momentum as it was seen as a way to increase the number of attractions on Interstate 80.

The first Wilber Czech Festival in 1962 attracted about 20,000 visitors. Main events at the festival included folk dances, accordion playing contests, a Czech operetta, a polka dancing contest, a kolache eating contest, and a Czech Queen competition. Churches and cafes served roasted pork, duck dumplings, kraut, jaternice and jelita, rye bread, and kolaches.[178] Following the success of the Wilber Czech Festival, other Nebraska towns, such Loup City and Stromsburg, were encouraged to create festivals that supported their Polish and Swedish heritages.

Over the years, ethnic and cultural festivals have grown in numbers and importance. For many descendants, these festivals serve as a reminder of their ethnic heritage and help to work

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[176] Hannan, 47.
[177] Šašková-Pierce, 213.
[178] Ezra Zeitler, "Creating America's 'Czech Capital': Ethnic Identity and Heritage Tourism in Wilber, Nebraska," *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 42, no. 1 (2009), 77.

against total homogenization.[179] But at the same time, there has been criticism that these festivals tend to rely on cultural stereotypes and attempt to change traditionally negative stereotypes into positive ones. In reality, ethnic festivals have done little to promote knowledge of a group's ancestral motherland. With the popularization of ethnic festivals in the 1980's, Czechs and Moravians were able to promote a revived ethnic consciousness even though the effort was a rather provincial, superficial, and commercialized version of the Czech ethnicity that was unfaithful to the original.[180] But no matter how far away from the original ethnicity the festival presents, people still find satisfaction in publicly demonstrating their ethnic identity.

One year after the first Wilber Czech Festival, Wilber gained the title of "Czech Capital of Nebraska", which helped to increase their tourism industry even more. In the late 1980's, U.S. Senator Ed Zorinsky introduced a bill to Congress with the hopes of making Wilber the "Czech Capital of the United States of America". The bill was signed on July 20, 1987 by President Reagan.[181]

Conclusion

Immigrants hold a special place in American history. From the very beginning of European settlement in North America to the twenty-first century, immigrant groups have attempted to form unique ethnicities that pulled from the motherland and their experiences in the United States. By doing so, immigrants have been able to create the infamous melting pot for which American society is know.

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[179] Sinke, 4.
[180] Hannan, 49.
[181] Ibid., 77.

Like many other immigrant groups, Czechs brought their traditions and way of life with them and adapted it to fit their new needs in the United States. They developed social networks to help each other in times of need. They created Sokols to encourage a healthy living and wrote Czech newspapers to inform the Czech community of Czech happenings in the community and around the world. Through these practices, the Czechs were able to fend off assimilation a little longer than most immigrant groups.

Through the analysis of language maintenance, farming practices, and intermarriage, a few conclusions can be made. It can be seen that the number of foreign-born Czechs in the United States peaked in the 1920s and 30s but then subsequently decreased in the following years. This essentially had a negative effect on the number of foreign Czechs who knew how to speak Czech. The lack of new foreign Czechs to the United States also affected the ability to maintain the Czech ethnicity as they lost touch with the motherland. Intermarriage became prevalent among Czech-Americans due to the decrease in new Czechs to the area among other factors.

By indoctrinating the Czech ways of farming into their children along with their views of land ownership, Czech-Americans have been able to maintain their position in the agricultural world. Only minor decreases in land ownership can be seen over time and in the case of Wilber Precinct a significant increase can be seen. By looking at the factors discussed, it is evident that the Czech immigrants and their descendents have taken pride in their culture, but, at the same time, have been subject to assimilating forces acting against them.

Today, immigration to the United States has a different meaning than that of a hundred and fifty years ago. When people think of immigration it is that of immigrants coming from Asia, Mexico, and the Middle East. White people are never asked what their ethnicity is and most do

not fully know the answer. The definition of the “American melting pot” has also changed. From its original meaning of homogeneity, the American melting pot now refers to multiple cultures coming together to create a diverse American society. But as American society has become more accepting and diverse, immigrants are still subject to assimilation and are forced to conform to what white Americans deem appropriate.

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